

SEVENTH EDITION

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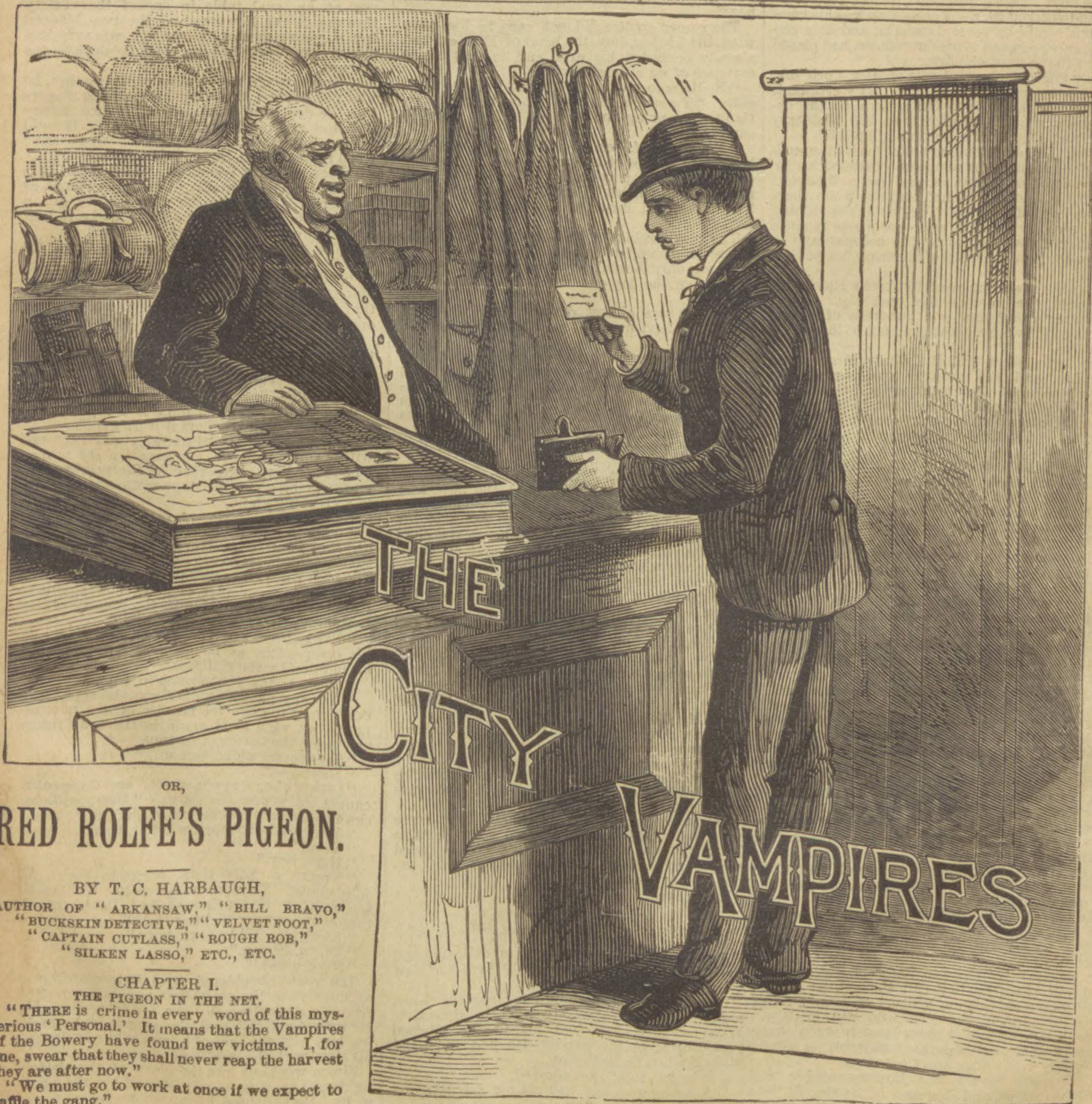
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OR,
RED ROLFE'S PIGEON.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,
AUTHOR OF "ARKANSAW," "BILL BRAVO,"
"BUCKSKIN DETECTIVE," "VELVET FOOT,"
"CAPTAIN CUTLASS," "ROUGH ROB,"
"SILKEN LASSO," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE PIGEON IN THE NET.

"THERE is crime in every word of this mysterious 'Personal.' It means that the Vampires of the Bowery have found new victims. I, for one, swear that they shall never reap the harvest they are after now."

"We must go to work at once if we expect to baffle the gang."

"At once! That is the motto! Let me read

IT WAS THE MEMORANDUM MORE THAN THE NAME, PERHAPS, THAT STARTLED
THE YOUNG DETECTIVE.

the 'Personal,' and if you don't see an infamous scheme in it, I'll vote for the dissolution of this firm," and the two youths who heard these words listened while the speaker read the following advertisement, which had been cut from the 'Personal' column of a morning paper of recent date:

"R. R.—The pigeon flies on the 20th. Its wings are new, but it will reach the net. Be on hand.
"X—X."

"There!" exclaimed the reader, looking at his companions. "What do you say now?"

"The scheme almost exposes itself," was the reply. "This is the day for the pigeon to fly."

"And for Red Rolfe to receive it as his first part of the game for wealth."

For a few moments there was no response, and silence reigned in the little room where three boys of seventeen sat at an oval table.

They were Archy Ray, Fred Martin, and Fred Webb, the two latter widely known as the Twin Feds; but the three collectively bore the firm name of Archy Ray & Co., and were known as young detectives who had already acquired a reputation for ferreting out city crime of all kinds.

The boys were all well-built, genial, good looking and without fear. Young Ray was his companions' senior by several months, and this circumstance, coupled to his shrewdness, had placed him at the head of the firm.

They knew the ins and outs of New York life, and the secret haunts of the city's criminals were better known to them than to the detectives who gathered nightly at 300 Mulberry street and compared notes and laid plans.

Archy Ray and Company made no high-sounding pretensions. The members possessed an in-born hatred of meanness, and more than one despicable scheme they had exposed when there was no hope of reward. They attacked villainy wherever they found it, and one clause in their mutual bond was to protect the helpless and to expose the petty schemes of the vampires of New York.

The advertisement read by Archy Ray to his companions had met his eye that day. It was one among a thousand, and hundreds of people had passed it with a glance, but not so the young detective.

The two letters "R. R." first attracted his attention, and the singular wording of the "Personal" told him that it covered some deep-laid scheme. For him to see the two R's was to fill the blanks by calling their owner Red Rolfe—a man who shall play a prominent part in our story.

If the initials stood for Red Rolfe, then the Twin Feds knew that a desperate and deep plot of some kind was on hand.

"If the pigeon has come to New York, it must not be plucked," said Fred Martin.

"It may be too late."

"No, not too late for us to work," announced the head of the firm with resolution. "In the first place, we must look in upon the haunt of the Bowery Vampires. They will tell us whether the pigeon has reached the city. I will take the Bowery trail, you will shadow Madam Bluebird's rookery, Martin, and you," to Webb, "will go to the Desbrosses Ferry. We know that the Vampires patronize that water-way whenever they have any river work on hand. Report here as soon as possible. Remember! eyes are to be open now! We have to deal with the slipperiest set of villains that ever infested a great city. A man who became noted as a forger and burglar in Europe, is no child in New York. We are off now!"

A few minutes later the little room on Chambers street was without a tenant, and the first street lamps were being lighted when the three boys separated, each to go the way chosen by their leader.

Archy Ray had assigned to himself the most important as well as the most dangerous part of the new enterprise.

He turned into the famous Bowery when it was at its best, with its blazing gas-jets and electric lights, with its confusion of horse-cars and pedestrians.

It was no new place to the young spotter; a thousand times he had run the gantlet of its dime museums, saloons, concert halls and Jew stores. He knew the men who did business there, and not a few of them knew in turn that some of their questionable transactions were known to Archy Ray and Company.

The youth struck the Bowery proper at Chatham street, and hurried up town till he reached the Thalia theater at its junction with Canal. The doors of the German play-house had already been thrown open, and the youth

was stopped by the crowd that blocked the sidewalk.

"Hello!" he suddenly exclaimed, as a man of Herculean proportions and a large sandy mustache came in sight. "Are you going to enter the Thalia, Red Rolfe? This is an incident entirely unexpected. No! you are not going to attend the play. Here we go!"

The man seen by Archy Ray almost brushed him as he came forward, and in a little while Red Rolfe, the ex-convict, had a shadower at his heels. The man was not disguised, and the young spy had no difficulty in keeping him in sight.

"Show me the pigeon, Reddy," laughed young Ray. "I want to look at the feathers you expect to pluck—you and the gang you lead."

Red Rolfe led Ray down the Bowery several squares, when he suddenly entered a certain house whose nearest neighbor was a pawnbroker's shop kept by a famous character called Pet Levi in the neighborhood.

Mr. Levi stood in front of his establishment in his shirt-sleeves, for the night was warm, and when Archy Ray reached the spot he caught the old Jew's eye.

"Here, mine frient!" cried Pet Levi. "Vat you got to leave mit your uncle to-night, hey?"

The young spotter did not care to lose time with the broker, but the hand of Pet Levi had already encircled his arm, and he was in the embrace of an animated vise.

"Nodings to pawn, hey?" screeched the Israelite. "Peezeness is very poor shoost now. Can't you pring me a leetle? Ah! you're a smardt von!"

"I'm no thief!" exclaimed the boy, drawing back with a show of indignation which, whether assumed or not, perplexed the Jew. "When I run down at the heel I'll unload for your benefit. When did business get poor for you, Pet Levi?"

The pawnbroker laughed and showed his discolored teeth under his hooked nose.

"I vas only shokin', poy!" he laughed. "Come in an' see the lay-out vat come shoost avile ago."

The boy was almost dragged into the store where Pet Levi went to one corner and unlocked a safe.

"Dese shoost come in," he said as he leaned over a show-case and unwrapped a paper that seemed to contain something valuable. "Peezeness won't starve Pet Levi outd when it prings such trade as this," and the young spotter was shown a small pocketbook which contained a gold ring whose setting was a beautiful diamond.

"Can I look at it, Pet?" asked the boy.

"Certainly, mine frient," said the Jew, and the pocketbook was placed in the boy's hand.

Pet Levi knew that Archy Ray was a terror to evil doers in that particular part of the city; more than once certain articles found on pawn on his shelves had given the boy a ciew to some theft, and between the two, man and youth, there had been some dealing, and all on the square.

"Dere is an inscription on de inside o' dot ring," said the Jew.

"I've found it already and it reads only 'From papa to Ruby,' signifying that it was a gift from father to child. There are several papers in the pocketbook. Did you look at them, Mr. Levi?"

"I saw dey vere nodings like money, and so I let them go," was the answer.

"I'll take a squint at them, then."

Archy Ray took the several slips from the pocketbook and opened them on the showcase before him.

The first was a little poem clipped from some newspaper, the second a printed advertisement for girls to work in a book-bindery at good wages, and the last an address that seemed to excite the boy spotter.

It ran thus:

"MABEL MARSHALL,
"Green Hill, N. J."

And beneath the address in a delicate hand was the simple memorandum: "Left for New York Aug. 20th."

It was the memorandum more than the name, perhaps, that startled the young detective. What strange fate had placed the pawned pocket-book in his hands? He had mastered himself when he looked up.

"Who left this?" he inquired.

"A young man vat had no use for diamond rings," laughed the Jew.

"You advanced him what?"

"Ten dollars."

Archy Ray shoved the pocketbook across the showcase.

"You'll not growl if the pledge is never redeemed," he said. "Listen to me, Pet Levi. The young fellow may have come honestly by that pocketbook, but I don't know."

"He did. Simon Lang vould not steal from his mother!" cried the Jew. "He found that pocketbook."

"He said so?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In the Desbrosses street ferry-house."

"When?"

"To-night."

"Ah!" exclaimed the young spotter to himself. "I see! the pigeon to be plucked has come to the net."

CHAPTER II.

SIMON LANG'S MISHAPS.

PET LEVI's singular estimate of Simon Lang's honesty was not altogether misplaced. That young gentleman who was somewhat dudish in appearance with a budding mustache and dreamy eyes, was enjoying the funds received on the pocketbook and ring at the old Jew's pawnshop. He was spending it in a rapid manner at an oval table in one of the variety theaters of the Bowery, and the two kindred spirits, young men of his own age, whom he had picked up, were helping him to deplete the amount.

If Simon would not steal from his mother, he was not beyond thrusting his tapering fingers into the depths of strange pockets, and Archy Ray was not much inclined to believe the old Jew's story that the pocketbook was "lost" when it passed into Simon's possession.

"I can get more where this came from!" exclaimed Simon exultingly to his companions as he displayed a two-dollar bill. "I've got a good account at Levi's, and I can make it last, or take it out in a lump, just as I like."

"You must have struck a gold mine, Simon."

"Didn't I? Scale me for a flounder if I didn't strike it rich to-night! Let me say, boys, that a man with his eyes open is apt to stumble onto a diamond mine these days."

"What was your mine, Simon?" asked one of the twain with a sly glance at the other.

"Wasn't I just talking about diamonds?" exclaimed the young Jew.

"Yes, but—"

"No 'buts' about it! mine is a regular diamond lead. Ask old Levi if it isn't so!"

Not far from the three jolly partners and within earshot of this conversation sat a man who seemed to be absorbed in the poor performance going on on the stage to the sorry melody of a creaking piano.

He was about forty years of age, well built but with round shoulders, and he had a keen eye that emitted a strange light at the very time when Simon mentioned his diamond mine. The man was rather well dressed, but he was by no means a frequenter of good society, else he had not occupied a table in the gallery of the Bowery Variety.

"I've got to leave you, boys," said Simon to his companions as he drained the glass last brought on by the waitress.

"Going to tap yer mine ag'in, Simon?"

"Not any more to-night," was the reply. "I don't want to draw too heavily on the new deposit, but we'll meet again in the near future and enjoy the favors of fortune."

"Ter-morrer night, Simon?"

"Maybe so."

"Let's make an app'ntment," and the speaker caught the young Jew's arm. "Merry while we can be—that's the ticket ain't it, Jim?"

"Very well—to-morrow night, then."

"Here?"

"Here, boy."

"You're a jolly clam, Simon! We're all jolly clams. To-morrer night, eh? We'll make the roof of this palace shake. Don't forget, Simon—to-morrer night at eight!"

"At eight. I'll be here, boys."

"Ta, ta, Simon."

"Good-night."

The round-shouldered man immediately lost all interest in the song that was being wafted from the stage through a cloud of tobacco smoke. He turned and followed the young Jew, watching him with the eyes of a lynx while he dogged his steps with the stealth of a panther.

Simon went out into the glare of the electric lights and tried to steady himself on the pavement. He had used his pawn money so freely that his head grew light whenever he took a step, and he knew that he was intoxicated.

"I'd better go straight home," he said, to himself. "There must have been something in the beer in there. Let me see. Have I my pawn-ticket? Oh, yes! here it is. I'm all right on that score. Steady now, Simon; you've kept your feet before in worse times than this."

He started down Canal with the man at his heels, and soon turned into Mulberry with his tracker still on the alert.

If Simon could have seen this man, if he could have noted the strange glitter in his eyes, he would have sobered up in an instant. But the young Jew was not looking back for spies; he was trying to avoid collisions with the many pedestrians who seemed to seek them.

As Simon reached a certain quarter in Mulberry, the pursuer increased his gait, and when the young Jew inserted a night key into the lock of a certain door the spy could have touched him.

Simon opened the door and was about to withdraw the key when a hand dropped upon his shoulder, and he almost sprang out of his shoes.

"Go in, Simon; go to your room. I will see you there," remarked the man, while the young fellow gazed at him, too astonished to speak. "I'm no corpse from the docks," continued the shadower. "Go in, I say."

Simon obeyed mechanically; he felt that there was no mistake, for the hand had not left his shoulder, and he could not avoid the terrible eyes.

"Is this your room, Simon?" asked the man, when the Jew had led him up-stairs to a small apartment on the second floor.

"It is."

"Sit down, then."

Simon dropped into a chair as a cold chill crept along his bones. He was entirely sober now.

"My business with you is this, Simon. I want your pawn-ticket."

The last sentence was uttered in a voice of much sternness. Simon instantly clapped his hand upon the pocket that contained the prize. His pawn-ticket, the ticket for the diamond ring and the little pocketbook? If the man had asked for his head, Simon would not have been more surprised.

The man had taken a seat in a chair directly in front of the young Jew; their knees almost touched.

"My—ticket?" gasped Simon. "Upon my honor, I don't know what you mean."

"Come! no foolishness, sheeny," was the reply. "I want the pawn-ticket Pet Levi gave you to-night. It is behind your hand there. Out with it!"

The eyes were threat enough.

"You want to rob me!" cried the young Jew.

"Call it by any name you please, Simon. You don't want to fool with me. I know what your ticket calls for."

"The ring isn't yours!"

"It may be before morning."

A gleam of resolution came suddenly into Simon's eyes. He sprang up.

"Will you resist? All right!" exclaimed the round-shouldered man, and the next moment the young Israelite's shoulder seemed to be between the jaws of a vise. "You will hand me the pawn-ticket, or I will take it from you, dead!" continued Simon's persecutor. "Men old enough to be your grandfather know by sad experience that I am not to be fooled with. Come, Mr. Lang! the ticket!"

Simon saw that resistance in the hands of that city Samson would prove useless; so he put his hand into the pocket that contained the pawn-check.

The eyes of the robber glistened when they saw it, and his dark-fingers snatched it from the young Jew's clutch.

"This is better than taking your life," he chuckled. "You can follow me to Pet Levi's if you wish, Simon, but you do so at your own risk. I would advise you to remain here, or elsewhere. You were playing a game of your own in the ferry-house, eh? I reckon you told Levi that you found the pocketbook?"

Simon said nothing. This man knew that he had carried the pocketbook and its precious contents to the old Jew's, and he believed that Simon had committed a theft in the ferry-house.

All at once he flung the young Jew away, and started toward the door.

"Don't follow me, Simon," he hissed, as the young man recovered. "It might not be healthy for you to do so. The next time you strike a diamond-mine, don't boast of it among the round tables. Good-night, Simon."

The man was gone, and the Jew was alone in

his little room—alone and despoiled of the ticket so valuable to him.

"I wonder if Pet Levi's hand isn't in this?" were his first words. "That old scoundrel is mean enough to put a partner on my track. The ring is worth several hundred, if I'm any judge of diamonds, and he only advanced me ten on it. If it is a conspiracy between Levi and his man, I'll know it. He said I had better not follow him. By Heaven! he doesn't know who he has robbed!"

Enraged beyond expression, the young Jew seized his hat and rushed out. Of course, the man who had despoiled him was out of sight; but Simon knew where Pet Levi's was, and he immediately started off.

"If there is no conspiracy, he will have a good time getting the treasure," muttered Simon to himself. "Old Levi is no child, and he is as strong as a lion when he fights for himself. But how did the man know I had the pawn-check if Pet Levi did not post him? The girl whom I plucked in the ferry-house was the last person I'd suspect of carrying diamond rings on her person. I'd like to know where she came across that one, and what brought her to New York. She looked like a country daisy—hang me for Judas! if she didn't!" And for the first time since leaving the Bowery Variety, the young Jew laughed.

He was not far behind the man who had robbed him, and he was rapidly shortening the distance between his lodgings and the old pawn-shop.

"Here I am, but the old nest is dark!" exclaimed Simon, a few minutes later. "No! there's a light beyond the shutter. Maybe my robber is bulldozing Pet Levi."

The young Jew glided forward, intent on seeing beyond the shutters of the shop. The next minute he had one optic at the crevice, and then he was struck a blow that made a thousand stars dance before his eyes.

CHAPTER III.

A SHREWD PLAY.

It was ten o'clock that night when the three boys who comprised the firm of Archy Ray and Company found themselves again in the snug quarters on Chambers street.

"You went to Madam Bluebird's rookery," said the young chief to Fred Martin "what did you discover?"

"Very little if anything," was the answer. "The old trap was as silent as the grave and almost as dark. In one of the upper windows was a faint light which went out suddenly while I looked at it. I saw the door open and got a glimpse of Madam Bluebird's charming countenance. After awhile a boy slid out and gave me a long chase. He went to the Desbrosses street ferry-house and scanned the floor with an eager eye. He looked under the benches and into the dark corners, as if he had lost a diamond breast-pin or something else of great value. I shadowed him back to the rookery, and left him there."

"They are looking for the ring," said Archy Ray.

"What ring?"

"The one the New Jersey pigeon lost in the ferry-house. They don't know that it fell into the hands of Simon Lang, the young Jew of Mulberry street."

"If I had known that, he would not have it now!" exclaimed Fred Webb. "I encountered that young dude on the Bowery about an hour ago."

"He did not have the ring on his person. I have seen it at Pet Levi's."

"Oho! he pawned it?"

"Yes. I struck a bit of luck which tells me that the pigeon mentioned in the 'Personal' we happened to alight on this morning flew to New York on the 20th. A young girl named Mabel Marshall is the bird mentioned. She got to the Desbrosses street ferry-house, for there Simon Lang got her pocketbook and ring. I have found the articles at Pet Levi's whither the young thief took them to pawn, but beyond the ferry-house I have not been able to track the girl. I am certain that she was lured to New York for some diabolical purpose and certain, too, that the Vampires of the Bowery, Red Rolfe and his pards, had a hand in it. The boy that Fred tracked from Madam Bluebird's rookery to the ferry and back again is in their employ, and he was sent there to hunt for the articles which the girl knows she lost in some manner this side of the river. The gang has not discovered that Simon Lang robbed the girl. We must find the Jersey pigeon. It will not do

to let her remain in the clutches of the Bowery Vampires who never play a scheme like this unless there is gold at the bottom of it."

"If Madam Bluebird is in the plot is not the girl Mabel in her trap?" asked Fred Webb.

"Perhaps," answered Archy Ray. "It is possible that the advertisement for book-binding girls which I found in Mabel's pocketbook may have lured her to the city; but it is certain that the gang knew of her coming, for she was met at the ferry by at least one of its members. We are not going to let this trail get cold. Whoever Mabel Marshall is she must be saved from the machinations of these Bowery leeches. Come!"

Half an hour later a well-built young man walked past Pet Levi's establishment and noticed that it was closed. Not a gleam of light could be seen beyond the shutters, and this was something unusual, for the old Jew always kept one jet burning over his varied stock.

A pair of keen eyes scrutinized the pawn-shop and subjected the upper windows to a close inspection.

"Pet Levi must have turned his establishment into a tomb," the youth murmured. "While the Twin Freds are taking up the trail at the ferry, I am going to play a risky game at a venture."

We need not say now that the speaker was Archy Ray, who after the conference at headquarters had returned to Mulberry street for the purpose of getting beyond the threshold of a house decidedly dangerous in more ways than one.

The young detective wore clothes of fashionable cut and quite "loud" in color. From his vest dangled a heavy chain presumably of gold, and the well-filled pocket suggested the presence of a costly watch. On his well-laundried shirt-bosom sparkled a pin calculated to deceive the keenest eyes for a while, and his whole make-up would have told the Bowery thief that he was a victim worth fleeing.

The old frame house occupied by the woman known to police and thief alike as Madam Bluebird was not far from Pet Levi's establishment. It was said to be the receptacle for stolen property, and its proprietress, a large woman with eyes like a tiger-cat, was the known consort of the worst inhabitants of the Bowery.

Strange to say Madam Bluebird had never been arrested, neither had her disreputable premises ever been searched. It was said that she and her pals stood in with the police, and that Red Rolfe and his gang knew that they could safely ply their calling as long as they kept united to Madam Bluebird.

Archy Ray kept on until he reached the house. At one side of it was a narrow alley a short distance from whose mouth the darkness was intense. After inspecting the building for a moment, the young detective dodged into the alley and disappeared.

A moment later the report of a pistol was heard, and the boy spotter rushed from the alley and staggered against Madam Bluebird's front door whose old-fashioned knocker he seized and jerked several times with violence.

Almost instantly he heard heavy footsteps beyond the door, and when it was open he fell inside with a groan.

"What do you want? I don't keep a hospital!" cried the Amazon, who shut the door and bent over the boy with a pair of blazing eyes.

Archy Ray rolled over so as to display his flashy chain and breastpin to the woman's gaze and groaned again.

"I believe I am shot!" he said. "You won't turn me out to die on the street? No, no! I have been followed by some man who wants what I've got. Where are the police?"

"Where they always are whenever anything happens—never on hand!" and Madam Bluebird showed her teeth in a grin.

"You won't let the villain follow me in here, will you?" said the boy. "I came to the city to-day to see the sights but if I had to do it over I'd never leave Genesee county."

The woman's eyes sparkled again.

"Where are you hit?" she asked, and before Archy could reply, she continued: "Of course I'll not let the pinker inside. I'll see where you are hurt myself. Can't you get up?"

Assisted by the woman the boy detective managed to rise, but with well-feigned difficulty, and he was led into an adjoining room where he was laid on a sofa and the gas turned on.

"What is your name?" asked Madam Bluebird.

"Solomon Solon. I was born and raised in Genesee, and I was a blamed fool to come to New York alone. I feel sleepy. Do you think the shot causes it?"

"I don't know," and about the woman's lips appeared a meanful smile.

The boy had discovered that Madam Bluebird held in one hand an object like a rubber ball and every now and then a thin spray with a peculiar odor touched his face. He had begun to feel drowsy under its influence, but he still kept his senses, and could see the avaricious glare that danced in the woman's eyes.

After awhile the boy's hand dropped from the sofa and he seemed to pass into a sound sleep.

"Everything is fish that comes into this net," chuckled the woman, as she lifted the young detective from the sofa and bore him from the room. "The country pigeon came to the right place to be plucked. Ha! ha! they've been coming in pairs of late. This is my game solely. Reddy and the rest needn't know of my catch to-night."

If Madam Bluebird was large in physique she also possessed the strength of a Hercules. She carried Archy Ray up-stairs with but little effort on her part, and deposited him on a low bed in a little room scantily furnished and forbidding in appearance.

When she retired she locked the door, and left the young detective in darkness.

"I am an inmate of the trap and robbed already!" exclaimed Archy Ray, leaving the bed. "My watch and chain are gone; so is the paste diamond that made Madam Bluebird's eyes glitter. I thought the jewelry would draw her on. I knew of no other method of getting into this den. She will discover that the jewelry is sham—Pet Levi will doubtless have the pleasure of imparting this information—therefore, I must go to work at once. I am supposed to be under the influence of chloroform, but, thanks to the drug I took before coming here, I am still myself. I came here to search this house. The Genesee pigeon is after the bird that came from Green Hill, Madam Bluebird."

For some time Archy Ray sat on the edge of the couch in the dark room. He heard the last sound in the house die away, as if Madam Bluebird had gone to sleep after her success.

He struck a noiseless match and found the door.

He knew that the Mulberry street vixen had locked it on the outside, but that did not discourage him.

A thin and pliable piece of steel was inserted into the key-hole, and after a while the lock yielded. The young detective opened the door and looked out.

At first he saw nothing, but he soon discerned a soft light, which seemed to be on the floor below, and the next moment he was leaning over a balustrade looking down upon a tableau that somewhat startled him.

In the hall, that extended to the street door, were two figures, one of which belonged to Mother Bluebird herself, the other was the figure of a man.

"Red Rolfe himself, perhaps!" ejaculated the youth. "I begin to believe now that I have not lost my jewelry for nothing. What would Reddy do if he knew I was here? Madam Bluebird won't give her catch away, for she doesn't intend to divide the proceeds of her little watch-lifting."

Eager to hear the conversation of the two persons who were talking in low tones, the young Chambers street detective leaned far over the balustrade and listened.

"We got the lost feathers by the merest accident, ha, ha!" laughed the man. "Julius found the young thief at the Variety, and forced him to give up his check. Ah! we never lose a game when Julius takes a hand!"

"Had the feathers gone to Pet Levi's?" asked Madam Bluebird.

"They were there. The old Jew looked thunderstruck when Julius walked in with the ticket."

"Did he resist?"

"Of course!" and the man laughed. "But, Julius worked a lay that always fetches Levi around. We have a grip on that old dog that never fails to win our games for us."

Archy Ray could hardly repress a cry that would have betrayed him.

"Heavens! the ring and pocketbook have passed from Pet Levi's hands into the power of the gang. They found Simon Lang, and made him give up his pawn-ticket."

"What about the dove? I've dropped the pigeon business now."

"Do you want her?" asked Madam Bluebird.

"Not just now," was the reply. "She is liable to be called for at any moment, though."

"What is she worth to us?"

"More than one hundred thousand. You

don't know all we know. If you did, you'd open your eyes. We're all playing our part of the game. I discovered the prize, Julius watched the flight from Jersey to New York, and Trix helped at the ferry. Nobody has got on to it yet. Pet Levi dare not open his mouth—"

"And Simon?"

"Trix never tells," was the reply that made the young detective start. "Never fear, Madam Bluebird. If we should be spotted, we are prepared to play the game through at all hazards. They call us four the Vampires of the Bowery. ha, ha! This time we've fastened on the richest prize we have ever found."

Archy Ray saw the man go away with a laugh of triumph on his lips, and as the door below was shut, he heard a cat-like step behind him. He turned, and not a second too soon.

CHAPTER IV.

MADAM BLUEBIRD'S TRAP.

READY to pounce upon the young detective, with hands uplifted and eyes that burned like the eyes of a tiger, was a nimble boy somewhat smaller than he. Archy Ray appeared to recognize the youth on the instant.

"This is the boy who searched the ferry-house for the pocketbook!" flashed across Archy's mind, and the next moment he met the boy halfway and the two grappled.

The detective was anxious to carry on the contest without alarming the woman downstairs, and his first dash was for his enemy's windpipe.

"Not so fast, spy of the cops!" hissed the strange boy, as he avoided Archy's grip for a moment. "You've come to the wrong place to ply your trade. Madam Bluebird's will prove the death of you."

"That is to be tried!" was the response, and the boy detective pushed his antagonist against the nearest wall, and at last got his hands at his throat.

Madam Bluebird's boy struggled with all the strength he could command, but he found that, despite his wiriness, Archy Ray was too much for him.

"You'll find my hands a regular vise!" grated the Chambers street spotter. "I know that I'm in a death-trap, and I propose to fight according."

The efforts of the strange youth were rendered futile by the spotter's tactics, and at last he gave up the struggle.

Archy Ray loosened his grip, to find his foe lying at his feet, almost black in the face and helpless. He was thankful that the spirited little battle had been carried on without noise, for no footsteps came up the stairs, and when he looked down the dimly-lighted steps he did not see the threatening figure of Madam Bluebird.

Archy's first action was to carry the insensible boy into the room he had lately vacated himself, and there he bound him hand and foot with the bed-cord, while he twisted a piece of bed-clothes into a gag.

"I heard that cat-like step behind me in the nick of time," said the boy to himself. "I find that I have to keep eyes and ears open in this house, and that is what I propose to do. From what I heard of the conversation between Madam Bluebird and the man who must have been Red Rolfe, Mabel Marshall must be in this house. I will go to work now."

Leaving the bound boy in the room, Archy Ray went out into the corridor again. The scene of the battle was quiet, and he looked over the balustrade without seeing any one.

He first searched, aided by the steel wire, all the rooms on that floor, but they yielded nothing. He next ascended to the third landing and continued the search. The result was the same.

If the boy detective had looked down the steps at a certain moment he would have seen a colossal figure coming up in stockinged feet.

Had Madam Bluebird an inkling of what was transpiring in her den?

The Amazon went straight to the room where she had left Archy after despoiling him of his jewelry purchased for the sole purpose of deceiving her. Opening the door she looked in and saw the dim figure of her own tool on the couch.

"Safe enough yet," she chuckled to herself as she turned away and carefully shut the door.

"The pigeon from the country will go back, if he goes back at all, without his feathers!"

She stopped on the landing opposite the room, and remained there, statue-like, for some seconds.

All at once she started up-stairs.

"Mebbe I didn't hear anything, and mebbe I did," she said to herself. "There used to be

rats in this trap, and they may have come back."

The next minute a door opened noiselessly in front of Madam Bluebird, and she started back at sight of the figure that appeared.

The little gas-jet that burned over the landing showed the city Amazon the boy she thought she had just seen asleep in a room below.

"Ar' there two of 'em?" cried Madam Bluebird, as she recoiled and almost fell backward down the steps.

"No! there is but one, and you do not want to fool with him!" answered the young detective sternly, as he covered the startled woman with a small revolver he had taken from the boy he had conquered on the floor below. "Don't raise your voice, nor scamper down-stairs, Madam Bluebird. The greenhorn from Genesee is not so green, after all. I recollect that I had a watch and a pin when I came here, and I discover that I am minus those articles now."

"Mebbe you think I took them," growled the woman.

"I have not said so," said Archy, laughing. "No, I would not accuse such an innocent woman as yourself. Stand where you are!"

The vixen of the den glared at the boy detective with the fury of a tigress; she clinched her hands and seemed about to throw herself forward. The young detective never stirred.

"You're not from Genesee county!" suddenly cried Madam Bluebird.

"Do you think so?"

"I know it!"

"How so?"

"Because you have called me by name."

"Right you are, Madam Bluebird."

"You came to my house to work a lay of some kind?"

"Perhaps."

"You are a spy!"

"Well?"

"You have been sent here by my enemies."

"So you have enemies, eh? I am sorry to hear that. I came here of my own accord."

"Who are you? Ah! you dare not tell me!"

The woman leaned forward with much eagerness as she spoke.

"Can't you guess, since you believe that I am not Solomon Solon from Genesee?"

"You are in the employ of the police who don't like me."

"I am my own police," the boy returned. "I know the man who has just been here. I know all about the pigeon who came from Green Hill, New Jersey, to be plucked in New York. She is worth more than one hundred thousand to the Vampires of the Bowery, eh, Madam Bluebird? What a fine set of feathers you have enticed to the New York net! I know all about the lost pocketbook and ring. Simon Lang, the young Jewish thief, got them first, and Julius made him surrender the pawn-check."

Madam Bluebird uttered a singular cry.

"In the name of Tartarus, who are you?" she cried.

"Time will show you," was the boy's response.

"You darsn't tell me now."

Archy's answer was a smile.

"We'll go down-stairs, Madam Bluebird," he said. "The person I want is not above the first floor. I have searched every nook and cranny of the two flats."

"You have?"

"Yes, and I found some goods that might create a sensation at number three hundred, Mulberry. You have escaped remarkably well, in the very shadow of police head-quarters. Stand aside, Madam. I prefer going down-stairs first."

The Amazon obeyed with a dark scowl and the young detective, with the revolver still cocked in his hand, passed her and went down the steps. Now that he had met the mistress of one of the most infamous traps known to the police of New York, he intended to show her no advantage.

She was aware that he was not a country boy who had fallen into bad hands while taking in the sights, and it was very evident that she believed him to be connected with the authorities in some manner. And Madam Bluebird knew that she had committed crimes enough to send her to Sing Sing for the remainder of her natural life.

"I am here for the New Jersey dove," said Archy, as he went down stairs with his face upturned to the woman forced to follow him under threat of the revolver. "Reddy has decided not to call him a pigeon any longer, and I will adopt the same course. In your parlor on the first floor we will come to an understanding."

"The dove isn't in my house," said Madam

Bluebird, with an effrontery that would have done credit to the coolest criminal.

"We will come to that down-stairs, I say."

"You can't intimidate me," was the quick response. "I mayn't be square in the eyes of everybody, but I don't make a prison out o' my house."

"No! you are not one of the Vampires of the Bowery," smiled Archy. "I could read your record with a completeness that would astonish you, Madam Bluebird. Ah! here we are at the first landing. Follow me down, madam; don't be backward."

The boy detective began to feel that he had the mistress of the trap in his power. He was more than ever convinced that a thorough search of the house would yield up Mabel Marshall, the Vampires' victim, and he was confident of making Madam Bluebird deliver her up at the muzzle of the six-shooter he held.

When he was in the middle of the first flight of steps the Mulberry street Amazon was at the top.

Her rounded hand rested on the balustrade and she was regarding him with a changed expression of countenance.

"Ain't you coming down?" he demanded. "Remember! this is no pieasantry on my part, Madam Bluebird. It is stern business."

The next moment the woman raised her hand and let it fall heavily upon a certain part of the top of the balustrade.

In less than a second the stair seemed to give way, and a wild cry pealed from the young detective's throat as he attempted to save himself.

"This is a devil's work!" he cried.

Indeed it was, for that portion of the stairway where he had stopped had fallen out of sight, and the boy disappeared as suddenly, with Madam Bluebird grinning into the abyss."

CHAPTER V.

THE TWIN FREDS AT WORK.

THE TWIN FREDS, as we know, went to the Desbrosses street ferry for the purpose of tracking Mabel Marshall from that place, while Archy was left to carry out his singular scheme for gaining admission to Madam Bluebird's trap.

The three young detectives were certain that the girl had been decoyed from her home in New Jersey, and enough had been discovered to warrant the belief that she had reached the ferry-house where it was feared she had fallen into the hands of vampires of the Bowery.

When the two Freds reached the boat-house the hands of various watches proclaimed the hour of eleven and despite that, a number of numbered cabs were in the street waiting for late passengers, and the ferry-house had a good many tenants.

"There is nobody looking for the pocketbook now," remarked Fred Martin who had followed Madam Bluebird's "lay" to the ferry already that night. "I hardly see where we are to take up the thread."

"Try The Statue, Fred."

"Ah! there he is now, but he may play sphinx."

A moment later the two boys approached an individual who appeared to be watching everybody at once. This person was a spare man of perhaps forty-five, with thin iron-gray beard, and strange gray eyes which, the latter, never still, danced like an excited Dervish. His garments were light and rather seedy in appearance, and many people knew that their owner had worn them in all kinds of weather for more than a year. This man supposed to be insane by some had haunted this particular ferry-house for several years. He usually came at sundown and remained till after midnight. His habit of occupying one position night after night had gained him the appellation of "The Statue," and there were hundreds of the ferry's patrons who knew him by no other name.

It was said that he was at one time a well-to-do citizen of New York who once went to the ferry to meet a daughter, and that the failure of the daughter to come had overthrown his reason causing him to come night after night on the same fruitless mission.

The Statue seldom talked, and as he was not molested, he carried on his vigils with unceasing regularity.

"The Statue sees everybody," continued Fred Martin. "If there was any bad work here to-night he saw it."

The slim man was not aware that he was to be addressed by the young detectives until Fred Martin's hand dropped lightly upon his own, and then his dancing eyes became fixed for a moment.

"Did you notice a young girl arrive on the boat to-night?" asked the young spotter.

The question was not very definite, but it was the best the boys could do. They had never seen Mabel Marshall, and therefore could not describe her. Fifty young girls might have reached the city by the ferry since sundown.

The Statue saw that the boys were deeply interested in the party for whom they inquired. It seemed for a moment that he had connected her with the lost daughter.

"A young girl?" he echoed in the strange voice he possessed—a voice which seemed to have been silent fifty years.

"Yes."

"Did she have a sack?"

The boys thought that Mabel Marshall would not leave Green Hill for New York without a traveling sack.

"I think she had," said Fred Martin.

"And a red shawl?"

That seemed to confirm the belief that a girl had come from the country.

"I don't know about the shawl; but it is quite likely that it was a red one."

"I saw such a person."

The Statue spoke deliberately, and before either of the boys could reply he continued.

"She came over on the seven o'clock boat, and was met by a man who conducted her to a cab waiting out there," the man nodded toward the street.

"It was Mabel Marshall!" exclaimed Fred Webb.

"He called her Mabel," said The Statue.

"Was she your sister, young man?"

"No, but I am interested in her as though she was," was the quick response. "You never saw before the man who received her?"

"Oh yes! They say I see everybody," and a smile came to the pale thin lips of the speaker. "He often comes to the ferry; sometimes he crosses."

"What is he like?"

"When he is himself, he is a well-built man with a reddish mustache."

The boys exchanged significant looks.

"Red Rolfe!" they both murmured.

"To-night he was dressed like a gentleman, and I had to look twice before I knew my old friend," said The Statue. "The girl did not see him for several minutes after she landed; she was that long in the crowd the boat brought over."

"When she found him—what?" asked Fred Martin.

"She seemed disappointed as if he was not the person she expected to meet."

"And they went off?"

"Yes, he took her sack and handed her into a cab out there."

"And got in after her?"

"That's just what he did."

The two boys were silent for a little while. They were certain that they had discovered that Red Rolfe the Bowery Vampire had met Mabel Marshall at the ferry: the sandy mustache and The Statue's outline description had given him away.

They looked toward the street as if the trail was lost there. They had no reason for hoping that The Statue had spotted the driver of the cab, for to him the girl's reception was nothing uncommon. As he never forgot anything, he had merely related to the boys one incident of night-life in New York.

"Come," whispered Fred Webb as he touched his companion's arm. "We can go no further than this."

"Wait."

Fred Martin lingered with one more question on his lips. He was going to ask The Statue if he could identify the cab or its driver.

All at once as if the frequenter of the ferry-house could read his mind, his question was forestalled by a remarkable utterance.

"The father of the man who drove that cab will have much to answer for at the bar of God!" he said.

The two boys started and looked into the tensely drawn visage of the strange man. The recollection of some terrible wrong seemed to have given birth to his singular sentence. His gray eyes burned, and his almost fleshless hands were tightly clasped.

"It is judgment!" he went on. "His son a common cab-driver, and night after night in the employ of the scum of New York! I've seen the day when he cherished the hope of living to see that boy in Congress. If justice asserted her rights, he'd see him in Sing Sing. I told him long ago that it would come to worse than this, and it will. Bob Benton has not touched bottom yet. I wouldn't soil my hands with him. He's

beneath me, and I live from hand to mouth, but not in the employ of thieves!"

The Statue straightened suddenly and looked toward the street.

The young scamp is here for another passenger," he said, his eyes dancing furiously again. "He never comes here without orders. Wait till the boat comes in. It is nearly due now."

The Twin Freds had already turned, and their gaze was riveted upon the young man who occupied the seat of a certain cab visible in the brilliant light in front of the ferry.

"So that is Bob Benton, the man who drove Mabel off?" ejaculated young Webb.

"That is his son!" was the reply, bitterly spoken. "Here is the boat now. Look out for the young scapegallows's passenger."

At that moment the well-loaded ferry-boat thumped against the pier, and began to discharge its eager freight. The boys moved toward the cab and began to watch.

The driver who was a young man, not past twenty, with a well-knit figure and prepossessing face, appeared to pay no attention to the throng that poured into the street. He seemed to know that the person for whom he waited would know him on sight.

For several minutes he was not noticed by any passengers of the boat, but all at once he was hailed by a man with a large valise who wanted to be driven to a hotel.

Bob Benton shook his head.

"Isn't this a hotel hack?" asked the man.

"No!" snapped Bob.

"You needn't cut your words out with a cleaver," was the answer. "Go to Halifax!"

A fierce look lit up Bob Benton's eyes, and they followed the passenger for some distance, when he bit his lip and waited for the expected person.

"Hang it all! he wasn't on that boat," he suddenly growled, as the last bunch of passengers left the ferry-house. "I'll go back and report."

He gathered up the lines and spoke to the horses, but the next moment he was commanded to "pull up," as a hack threatened to collide with him.

Bob fell back and drew his horses almost to their haunches, and for a little while the air was full of oaths.

"Come! follow me," said Fred Martin, touching his companion. "We'll get something out of all this tangle if we play it fine."

The young detective glided to the dark side of Bob Benton's cab and laid his hand on the plated door-catch. Bob was devoting his attention to the somewhat reckless driver of the other hack, and the two men were ready to leap from their boxes and go at one another with their whips.

For Fred Martin to reach the cab door was to open it, and in a moment he and his comrade were seated beyond it and the blinds already down hid them from view.

"Now for a ride behind Bob Benton's whip," he whispered to Fred Webb. "The Statue was no Sphinx to-night, eh, Fred?"

"We struck him in good humor for once. I feel that we are on Mable Marshall's trail."

By this time the entanglement had been worked out without a fight, and the two boys were being carried up Desbrosses street at a rapid rate.

"Bob is wreaking his ire on the horses," chuckled Martin. "There would be holy horror to pay if he suspected that he was carrying the bulk of the firm of Archy Ray and Company, shadows and detectives. Where are we now?"

Fred Webb raised one corner of the curtain and looked out for a moment.

"We are bowling over Canal," he said.

"Good!" exclaimed Fred Martin. "Bob is taking us to the Bowery!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE STAKES IN THE GAME.

"We are in the Bowery!" suddenly exclaimed Fred Webb when the fast-flying cab left Canal. "Bob Benton is going to report to the Vampires, sure enough."

"There is no longer any doubt of this," was the reply.

"Shall we keep the cab till it stops?"

"Yes."

The closed vehicle kept up the Bowery for several squares, when it drew to the sidewalk and finally stopped.

Bob Benton sprang down from his elevated perch and approached the house opposite. Fred Martin raised the curtain and looked out.

"I see Pet Levi's three gold balls," he said in

a whisper. "Bob is at the first door to the left of the old Jew's quarters."

"Red Rolfe's house," was the answer. "Let us see who opens it."

The nearest light enabled the two boys to see the door at which the driver of the cab had stopped and together they watched anxiously for the response.

Presently the door was opened just a little, and Bob Benton leaned forward and said something in a voice too low to be heard.

"That is his report," said one of the boy spotters! "Is the man in the door Reddy?"

"No; the figure is too small for him. It is not Julius either."

"Then it is the man called Trix; he is the smallest of the gang, you know."

The door shut suddenly and Bob Benton came back to the cab.

"No more duty to-night, thank fortune," the boys heard him say. "I can go back and turn in now. They don't like it because the fellow they expected didn't come over on the ferry, but I couldn't help that."

The cab rattled on again, and as it left the Bowery, Fred Martin seized his companion's wrist.

"Let's get out of this," he said, in low tones. "Bob is going to his quarters, and will do us no more good to-night. When we want him he won't be hard to find."

The next moment the door of the cab was cautiously opened, and Fred Martin leaned out and looked at the man on the box. Bob Benton was looking straight ahead and was not likely to see any movements alongside; therefore, the agile young detectives dropped lightly to the street one after the other and disappeared, with Bob none the wiser for their stolen ride.

In the mean time, the man who had held the brief conversation with Bob at the door adjoining Pet Levi's establishment had returned to a back-room, where he met two men who were seated at a table that occupied the middle of the apartment.

One was undoubtedly Red Rolfe, for the sandy mustache gave him away, and the other was a man somewhat larger and very like the person who had robbed Simon Lang, the young Jew pickpocket, of his valuable pawn-ticket.

"Didn't he come?" asked Red Rolfe, in ill-humor, when he saw the third party come back unaccompanied.

"Bob didn't see him."

"Furies! he never missed before," was the rejoinder. "Mebbe Bob didn't recognize him. Bring in the dove. We will get at this business without him."

The man who had answered Bob's summons was about to leave the room, when a little bell tinkled in one corner and all three started.

"It is Phlox! He missed Bob!" exclaimed Red Rolfe.

Two minutes later there walked into the room a man whose appearance was the signal for several exclamations of joy.

"Phlox!" cried Red Rolfe, springing forward.

"I'm nobody else. What kind of a fellow did you send to the ferry for me? I asked your man if he couldn't haul a fellow up-town, and got a cursin' for my trouble. Then I got here the best way I could. But I'm here. How goes the game?"

"First-rate, so far," was the reply.

"The Jersey pigeon came?"

"Yes."

"And was met at the ferry?"

"By me," said Red Rolfe, with a smile.

"No accidents?"

The three Vampires exchanged glances.

"Accidents? yes," continued Rolfe. "She was robbed at the ferry by Simon Lang, the young sheeny; she lost her pocket-book and diamond ring, and it got into Pet Levi's possession."

"Simon pawned it, eh?"

"Yes, but Julius there got on to the lay and euchered the young thief out of his pawn-ticket."

"Didn't I?" ejaculated Julius, who by his grin showed that he was the man who had watched Simon Lang in the theater. "I got the goods back with that ticket, too," he went on. "Levi was stubborn for a little while but I worked the penitentiary string on him, and made him shell out. Simon followed me contrary to orders. Trix yonder is authority on his present whereabouts."

The man who had joined the Bowery Vampires glanced at Trix, whose little eyes were sparkling with triumph.

"I know; let that suffice!" laughed Trix.

"Now, what about the real worth of the dove's feathers?" asked Red Rolfe of Phlox.

"You had no difficulty in working the lay in Jersey?"

"Not much. The book-bindery advertisement attracted the girl, as I thought it would. She met me accidentally and showed me the 'ad' which she said some friend had sent her. I was playing the role of Mr. Silas Strong, and she doesn't dream that I am Phlox nor anybody else who is against her. She is undoubtedly the person I always said she was. The diamond ring which was left her by her mother is proof enough. She goes by the name of Mabel Marshall, but when the time comes we will prove her another person. There is a cool hundred thousand in this game, gentlemen. When do you begin your courtship, Trix?"

The speaker turned abruptly upon the man to whom he put the question and ended his sentence with a laugh.

Trix was the youngest member of the gang. He was a man of twenty-eight with a fine figure, a handsome face and bright blue eyes, and did not look much liked a practiced villain.

"Oh, I can begin at any time," he said. "It won't be a long courtship I hope."

"No," said Phlox. "I want it over soon, for I'm getting down to hard-pan, and I want to handle some of the coming Mrs. Trix's wealth. You have never seen the girl, Trix, but despite her country notions, you'll like her at first sight. Where is she, Reddy?"

"In this building."

"So near? I thought—"

"She was taken in the first place to Madam Bluebird's, but the removal was quietly made an hour ago, and the golden dove is now beneath this very roof."

"What does she think?"

"The child seems dazed and acts like a person in a dream."

"Does she suspect foul play?"

"Not yet. She made a great ado over the robbery, but her pocketbook has been restored intact, and she looks upon me as a model of friendship and honesty."

The Bowery Vampires laughed over the table and Red Rolfe pulled the ends of his mustache.

"I have told her that a friend of mine found the pocketbook, and she will believe that that friend is Trix when he has been formally introduced."

"That was a lucky stroke!" exclaimed Phlox. "It opens the way for Trix, and I call it a good play, Reddy."

"I never make a bad one!" was the quick retort. "To-morrow Trix meets our dove and the courtship begins. I think I can safely say that within five days he will be a married gentleman!"

"Hurrah for Trix!" cried Julius leaning over and slapping Trix on the shoulder. "A girl worth one hundred thousand isn't picked up every day. I laughed when Phlox said two months ago that he had unearthed a gold mine in New Jersey, but now I take it all back. Accept my apology, Phlox."

Phlox who was a keen looking man with intensely dark eyes and a smooth face bowed and laughed with the fellow who addressed him.

"It is simply this in a nut-shell, gentlemen," he said seriously. "This girl, Mabel Marshall as she is called, is the daughter of Thomas Whitmore the Bond street merchant who died three years ago leaving a fortune of over one hundred thousand dollars to his daughter, if she be living. It is no secret that when the child was about a year old Mrs. Whitmore, in a fit of temporary insanity, left home, taking the babe with her. Since that time she has not been heard from and the still prevalent belief is that she walked from the docks with the child in her arms. We know better than that, gentlemen; we know that the gold dove now in our possession is Ruby Whitmore; the ring mentioned so often in the advertisement put forth by the Bond street merchant is proof enough. We've got the whole game in our hands, gentlemen. The girl is to become Trix's wife, then we play an open hand for the legacy and have a jolly time with it. We are not Bowery Vampires for nothing, eh, Reddy?"

"Not by a long shot!" laughed Red Rolfe.

Phlox got up and looked about the room.

"This room is next to Pet Levi's," he said suddenly, with a quick glance at his companions.

"It is, but the walls are thick, and besides our uncle is somewhat deaf," replied Reddy. "Julius frightened him to bed when he went for the pocketbook."

Not quite satisfied, Phlox went to the wall and struck it with his knuckles. It sounded cold and dead.

"Are you satisfied, Phlox?" asked the head of the gang.

"I guess so. I'm going now. To-morrow I will see you all. You will introduce Trix, Reddy, and be certain to tell her that he is the gentleman who found her pocketbook."

If the four men could have looked beyond the wall at that moment they would have beheld a sight calculated to stir their blood.

Under one of Pet Levi's counters a man was crouched on the floor, and one of his snaky eyes was near the wall. His figure was bent nearly double, and he was looking and listening with all his might.

Pet Levi, the pawnbroker!

"It ish a big game!" muttered the Jew. "Dat diamond ring ish worth more as a hoon-dred t'ousand to the man vat holds it. The scoundrels took it from me with Simon's check, and now they will play it for all it ish worth. They don't know Pet Levi. By to-morrow night they will know that de old Jew kin play the biggest card."

His eyes glistened like carbuncles as he crept to his flimsy cot in a dark corner of his pawnshop, and for a long while he lay awake gloating over the discovery he had made.

He thought only of avenging the second theft of the pocketbook and ring, and never dreamed that he was soon to furnish the city with another tragedy.

As for the conference in Red Rolfe's house, it broke up quietly, and Trix and Phlox went out upon the street.

It was midnight now, and the Bowery was comparatively silent.

"Look! Trix and a friend," said one of two boys. "It is neither Julius nor Reddy Rolfe."

The next moment the twain drew back into the alley at whose mouth they stood, and Trix and his companion walked past.

"Come! we will run these Vampires down!" continued the youth who had discovered the conspirators. "This is the most exciting night I have ever seen."

The two Freds were soon tracking the two men down the Bowery.

"They're gone!" suddenly cried Fred Martin.

"The sidewalk must have opened and swallowed them," was the response, and the two young spotters hastening forward, found that Trix and Phlox were not to be seen.

CHAPTER VII.

IN HER OWN TRAP.

WE must not forget Archy Ray, the young detective whom we saw disappear with the falling stair so deftly manipulated by the cool hand of Madam Bluebird. The last thing that the boy saw ere he was swallowed up by the darkness, was the huge figure and the hideous grin of the mistress of the trap.

Then oblivion came suddenly, for the boy detective struck something unyielding, and the stair trap swung back to its place and remained fixed, as though nothing had happened. Madam Bluebird descended the stair with a good deal of agility for one so large, and burst into one of the lower rooms in transports of rage.

"It was a narrow escape! The young imp actually held a cocked pistol at my head!" she cried between her mad gasps. "After all, he isn't a greenhorn from the country, but a young spy of the cops who has got onto the racket Reddy is working. How the cool young wretch did take me in! He shall never leave this house alive. I'll answer for that. But didn't the trap catch him nicely? Ha, ha! I let him reach the right step before I sprung it, and then—out of sight he went like a ball dropped into a well."

Madam Bluebird talked thus in excited tones, and with nobody to listen. She was the sole occupant of the room, but she did not seem to notice it.

With her last sentence she went to a heavy oaken stand and jerked out a drawer, from which she took a short and formidable-looking revolver.

"I'll show him that I have the best of this game," she went on. "If he came here to find something out about the Jersey dove, he let me filch his jewelry, just to draw me on, and I'll wager my head that the watch is Peter Funk, and the stud, too."

Light was fast breaking upon Madam Bluebird, and a minute later the room on the first floor was deserted.

Meanwhile Archy Ray was recovering from a fall which would have killed many people. The falling stair had dropped him from a height that rendered his escape from death almost miraculous, and when consciousness came back he got up and reflected.

"The person who sprung that infamous trap

will inspect my prison," he said. "The eyes of Madam Bluebird will look in upon me before long, and she will come here bent on finishing the work she began. The best thing I can do is to prepare for the city Amazon. She will not hesitate to kill when she comes. I think I've already sent every drop of her blood up to boiling heat."

He remembered that he held a revolver in his hand when the trap fell, and he now began a search for it in the darkness, for with it again in his possession he could defy the Amazon, and perhaps dictate terms.

But his most minute search failed to find the weapon, and he finally concluded that it had adhered to the stair in some mysterious manner.

"I'll have to fight the vixen with bare hands," he said, not encouraged by the reflection. "I would give a good deal for the revolver, but as it isn't to be found, I'll have to do the best without it."

Some time passed away and not a word of any kind broke the silence of the cellar into which the young detective had fallen.

All at once he heard a noise like a key turning in a lock, and he instinctively turned toward the sound.

"That's the Queen of the Vampires," ejaculated Archy Ray. "Now for the interview that decides everything."

The noise had told him where the door was likely to open, and in a moment he had stationed himself against the wall.

He did not have long to wait, not more than twenty seconds, when a door opened without any noise and the boy heard the steps of a heavy person.

Madam Bluebird had come to the trap!

Archy Ray counted the seconds, for he heard the short breaths of the woman and presently he caught the glimmer of a dark-lantern which the woman now brought into view.

"I guess the fall fixed the rat of the cops," she said. "This stillness means death, and I will not have to use the persuader I brought along."

She moved toward the center of the cellar throwing the light about as she advanced, and Archy with every nerve on tension watched his opportunity.

The door had been left slightly ajar, and the key was on the outside.

All at once he sprang to one side and the next second he had thrown the door open.

Madam Bluebird heard the cat-like spring and wheeled in time to see the boy disappear.

Suddenly the door shut—shut in her face, and before she could reach the latch to jerk it open again by an exercise of her great strength, the key clicked and she was a prisoner in her own cellar!

The young detective's break did not seem to have occupied three seconds.

"Catch a fox asleep will you, Madam Bluebird?" laughed the boy. "We will see who comes out best in this game. Whip me for a gutter-snipe if I don't hold the daisiest cards at this writing! By Jerusalem! you can enjoy the comforts of your own trap while I inspect that part of this den not yet inspected."

Archy Ray coolly pocketed the key and walked off leaving Madam Bluebird to rave out her madness in the gloom of the cellar.

He would have laughed could he have seen her beating the air with her huge fists and heaping imprecations of the vilest kind upon his head. She resembled a wounded tigress in her wrath, her eyes looked like balls of fire as they flashed before the bull's-eye of the lantern, and if she could have encountered the young detective she would have flung herself upon him.

Archy Ray was now bent on finding some clew to Mabel Marshall, or the girl herself. He went into room after room and looked for hidden doors and secret apartments. He was aware of the fact that he was still in one of the most mysterious and dangerous houses in New York—a house feared by some of the most fearless police, and he had to proceed carefully and be prepared for surprises.

In one room he found a revolver which he grasped eagerly, and for a moment thought of going back to the cellar to force from the lips of its prisoner the secret of the girl's hiding-place. He was in the midst of his search when the front door opened and as the boy detective hugged a dark corner he saw two men enter the hall.

One he recognized; the other was unknown to him.

"Trix and a pal," he said to himself. "They have come to see Madam Bluebird. It is something about the girl—my head on that!"

"Where can the old Amazon be?" asked the

man whom Archy did not know. "A bell rings, or used to, whenever the front door opens."

Trix seemed perplexed.

"She has the hearing of a fox, but she hasn't heard us, which is very strange," he said.

At that moment a singular sound penetrated the hall. It seemed to be the faint cry of some person under ground, and it sent a nameless sensation to the young detective's heart.

"What was that?" exclaimed Trix's companion grasping his arm.

"Listen! maybe we'll hear it again."

And they did.

It was Madam Bluebird in the cellar, lifting her voice in her rage, and the two men listened with cheeks almost white from fear.

"It is the Bluebird!" ejaculated Trix. "She is in a muddle of some kind, or she wouldn't let off steam in that manner."

"Which way is she?"

"This!—come!"

The two men turned and darted away, leaving the boy spotter the occupant of his corner and not five feet from their starting-point. His escape was most remarkable, for if either of the men had thrown a keen look toward him, he must surely have been discovered.

At any rate, he heard Trix open and shut several doors, and then the cries of the infuriated Amazon ceased.

"They will come back after me," exclaimed the boy, springing to the front door. "I will let them get Madam Bluebird out of her trap as best they can. I am satisfied that Mabel Marshall is not in this house now, although she undoubtedly was brought here from the ferry. I believe I have searched every corner of this infamous den, and if I haven't found Mabel, I have discovered swag enough to enrich a dozen middlemen like Pet Levi."

He did not reach the door a moment too soon for he heard a noise behind him and then the mad oath of a man.

The next moment he bounded into the street, and Trix's partner landed by the door just too late.

"Curse the imp!" growled Phlox, who held a revolver in one hand, while his eyes blazed. "If I had been a moment sooner, I would have nabbed him. He's carried off the key of course, and we must pick the lock to get the Bluebird out."

Phlox probably knew better than to follow into the street the figure he had seen disappear through the doorway. He did not even go to the step to see whether the boy was in sight, but bolted the door and turned back.

"Heavens! is it you, Archy?" cried a voice on the street, and to the young detective's amazement, he was confronted by the Twin Freds. "You came out of Madam Bluebird's while we were contemplating it, as if you were shot out."

"If I had staid I should have been shot inside," laughed Archy Ray. "What have you discovered? I have tumbled headlong through darkness at the risk of breaking my neck to find out that Mabel Marshall is not in Madam Bluebird's cage. Do you know where she is?"

The two boys were forced to shake their heads.

"Never mind, the trail is not lost," said Archy Ray. "I have set out to find that girl and to thwart the Vampires of the Bowery, and it shall be done!"

CHAPTER VIII.

UNMASKED.

In a rather well-furnished room of not large dimensions stood a fair young girl, who could not have passed her nineteenth year.

Her figure was slender and grace itself, and her beautifully-molded face showed traces of intense anxiety if not of sorrow.

She was simply clad, and there was about her a rural air which the city had not dissipated.

This girl was the person in whose cause Archy Ray had so heartily enlisted; this was the Mabel Marshall, of Green Hill, who had been decoyed to New York by the greatest villains unhung.

It was the morning after the night that witnessed the events recorded in the foregoing chapters, and the Jersey dove stood at a window and looked out upon the Bowery, already teeming with busy life.

"Mr. Silas Strong, who got me to come to New York, did not promise me anything like this," she said. "I was to be taken to the bindery by the gentleman who met me at the ferry, but I have not seen it yet. My pocket-book and ring have been restored to me, and I am to thank the person who found them some time this morning. I wish now that I had not come to the city. I was happy at Green Hill, but a little

bit ambitious. Can it be that I have fallen into a trap—that I am the victim of a conspiracy? No! Who would conspire against me, a poor girl?"

She stepped back from the window at a slight sound, and the next moment the door opened and Red Rolfe, cleanly shaven, well dressed, and with his sandy mustache dyed a dark brown, walked into the room.

He was followed by a person smaller and younger than he, and, like himself, well attired and good looking.

"This must be the person who found my lost property," thought the girl to herself. "He is handsome at any rate, and appears to be a gentleman."

Red Rolfe came forward with his eyes fastened on the fly in the web, and waved his hand toward his companion.

"Miss Mabel, this is Mr. Trego, the gentleman who restored your lost articles," he said.

Trix, *alias* Mr. Trego, made a profound bow and doffed his hat, as a flush suffused Mabel's cheeks, causing her eyes to drop in confusion.

The young girl hardly knew what to say, although she had been expecting the meeting, and when she at last began, she found herself alone with the young man. Red Rolfe had slipped away.

Trix had been brought to the girl to play that part of the game assigned to him, and he intended to play it to the best of his ability.

He accepted Mabel's thanks in a manner intended to impress her favorably with him, and told her that he had found the pocketbook in the ferry-house.

"I am a stranger here," said Mabel. "A gentleman named Silas Strong, who was stopping at Green Hill, showed me the advertisement for girls for a book-bindery, and through him I consented to come here. The gentleman who has just left the room is one of the proprietors of the bindery, I am told. He met me last night at the ferry and has furnished me these quarters for the present. Do you know him well?"

"Oh, quite well," said Trix, "and a better man than Abner Abom doesn't live in New York. When I told him that I had found a certain pocketbook, he nearly embraced me, and I then learned that it belonged to one of his new employees. You were not brought direct to this house?"

"Oh, no," said Mabel quickly. "I was driven from the ferry to another place, but quite late last night I was induced to take quarters here. Mr. Abom said that these had been made ready for me, and I do not want to go against his wishes."

A faint smile came to the corners of Trix's mouth. The girl was still undeceived.

"Has Mr. Strong returned to the city?" she suddenly asked.

"Not yet, I believe," was the answer, though Trix knew very well that Silas Strong was one of Phlox's many names.

The girl was about to speak again, as her manner indicated, when startling words were heard:

"By the eternal heavens! I will choke the old sheeny to death! We've got the dove in our clutches, and we're entitled to all the feathers. Intimates, does he? Let me see—"

"Hush! She is in the house, remember," interrupted a voice that silenced the loud talker, and then Mabel could hear no more.

A singular light had come into the beautiful victim's eyes; her cheeks suddenly lost color and her gaze became fixed on Trix.

"What does that mean?" she exclaimed, stepping toward the young man, who was wishing that he had his hand at the roysterer's throat. "That man's voice sounded like Mr. Strong's. It was in this house, too! Does Mr. Abom possess many visitors like that?"

"Not many. It is a matter of business between them, nothing more," said Trix.

"To Tartarus!" suddenly broke forth again, "I say to Tartarus with the rascally Jew! He will blow up the whole game! We won't get to pluck the dove from Green Hill, if we let him—"

Mabel heard no more, for a strange cry parted her lips, and she darted toward the door.

"I see it all!" she exclaimed. "My God! I have been brought into a trap of some kind. That man means me when he talks about the dove from Green Hill. Let me go!"

The last sentence was an appeal to Trix, who had sprung forward and caught her by the wrist.

"Let the fool go on," he said. "There may be a dozen Green Hills in the United States."

Mabel drew back the length of his arm.

"No! he means my home," she said. "I know that Silas Strong is in this house. I have

just heard his voice. If you have pity you will let me go."

But Trix had no intention of releasing the wrist he was clutching so firmly. He looked down into Mabel's eyes and held on.

"You are in the plot, too," she went on. "If you were not, you would let me escape from this place. Who knows but that my pocket-book was stolen just to bring about this introduction?"

"Out where those men are quarreling over something we don't know anything about?"

"I know about it," said the girl through her teeth. "The high words were about me."

"You? ha, ha, ha!" and Trix laughed as he looked down into the white face of the Vampires' victim.

Mabel saw that she was held by a hand that would not let her take another step toward the door. There was business, but no mercy, in Trix's eyes.

"I am helpless in the nest of a set of villains!" fell in accents of despair from her lips. "I wish I could blot from recollection the day I first met the serpent Silas Strong. His coming to Green Hill must have been a part of the plot against me. But why am I the victim? I am poor. I have nothing but my poor mother's ring."

Trix laughed again as he leaned forward till his face almost touched the girl's.

"That ring is worth a hundred thousand!" he said. "You have come to New York to get a husband. Behold him before you, Mabel."

The girl's look suddenly became a stony stare. She tried to break away, and a cold shudder stole over her frame.

"You?—you?" she cried. "Am I to become your wife?"

"I'd bet fifty thousand that you are!" was the reply. "You might as well get ready for the bridal, for no power in this city can prevent you from becoming the wife of Trix, the Bowery Blossom!"

Once more the girl made a violent effort to break from the grip that held her, but it seemed to tighten as she pulled. All at once her senses seemed to leave her; she tried to throw off the terrible sensation, but in vain. The room about her suddenly grew dark, and with a cry she reeled away to be caught by Trix, who threw out his arms.

Two minutes later a young man dashed into a room where two persons were seated at a table.

He looked at one particularly, and sprung at him with blazing eyes and eager hands.

"Why didn't you hold your tongue, Phlox?" he cried, halting before the man. "You had to give the whole thing away to the Jersey dove, and she's now lying in a faint in your room."

"The old Harry she is!" was the response. "I'll go and see—"

"You'll not do anything of the kind," was the interruption. "She heard every word you said, which was too much. She called you Silas Strong too."

"You've played the fool, Phlox," said the man across the table.

"If I have it sha'n't balk the game. What's a mere girl against us?"

"Nothing, of course. We'll play the game out if she does know that she's in a trap, but I didn't want the expose yet. But who is it you're going to choke, Phlox?"

"That old rat, Pet Levi! He must have got onto some of our talk last night. By the fiends! I am going to choke him!" and Phlox's hand hit the table like a hammer.

CHAPTER IX.

ONE MINUTE TOO LATE.

"THE girl is not under Madam Bluebird's roof," said Archy Ray to himself as the shadows of another night gathered over the city of New York. "I searched the trap at my leisure after I had locked the old vixen in the cellar. We must look for Mabel where Red Rolfe and his pals are. If she is not found and rescued soon we will be too late. The Bowery Vampires let no grass grow under their feet when they have an important scheme on hand. If we take up the trail step by step we may reach the end too late to help the victim much."

"We might precipitate matters by a raid."

"On Red Rolfe's haunt next door to Pet Levi's?"

Fred Martin nodded.

"No. I don't want the police brought upon the ground yet," was the young detective's answer. "This is our case, and we shall work it up without help. A raid on that trap would find the Vampires prepared, and Mabel might not be found. They will take precautionary

measures anyhow. Trix and his companion who released Mother Bluebird know that some one has got onto their scheme. They will likely suspicion us, for a year ago we gave the gang some trouble, you know."

"What is the next move, then?"

"I am going up to Pet Levi's. Look here; this brief letter tells me that I am wanted there," and Archy Ray showed his two companions a poorly scrawled note he had received by a boy messenger within an hour to the following purport.

"MR. RAY—You will learn of something to your advantage if you will call at Pet Levi's, the Bowery, between eight and nine o'clock to-night."

There was no signature to the note, but the young spotter knew that it had been written by the Jew.

Was the old pawnbroker going to tell him how the pocketbook and ring belonging to the missing girl had left his hands, or had he some clew to the whereabouts of Mabel herself?

Pet Levi was a shrewd old fellow, a driver of hard bargains where he was concerned, and the three detectives knew that he took no step unless there was something in it.

"Now that you have discovered Bob Benton's loafing place, I think you had best shadow him while I go to Levi's," Archy continued to the Twin Feds. "If the gang have any cab work to-night they will give it to him, and by watching Bob we may alight on some important clew."

"All right!" said the two boys. "You work the Levi racket for all there is in it, and we will spot the cab-driver hated so cordially by The Statue at the ferry."

The three boys went out upon the street together, and the next moment two men evidently waiting for them started slightly.

"There are the ferrets that have scented us," said one of the men who had evil eyes and a powerful physique. "I'd give my head almost to have them in my power for five minutes. They worked a racket against us a year ago and caused us a deal of annoyance. There they go. Ready. Off we are, too."

The boys had the keenest eyes in New York on their every movement, and when they started off they were followed by the two men.

"We don't need Julius and Trix to help us deal with those young ferrets," said Red Rolfe with a smile. "We'll run them in before the night is very old, and our people will never be troubled with them any more. Let us get closer and hear what they are saying."

"Not now," was the reply, and the speaker's hand touched Red Rolfe's arm. "We can keep them in sight and that will do for the present. They don't know where the girl is, and they can't find out. She knows that to-morrow night she is to become the wife of Trix whether she consents or not, and then we will show the hand for the hundred thousand."

"We must not appear in the play, Phlox."

"Of course not, nobody but Trix, and the police don't know that he is one of us."

"I see only one danger."

"Well?"

"The girl might refuse to help us."

Phlox looked into Red Rolfe's face and laughed.

"You don't fear that, eh?" he smiled. "You don't think that four men like us can't bulldoze one country girl, do you? By heavens! she knows better than to cross us now. When I told her to-day that she should become a wife to-morrow night she saw a light in my eyes which told her that I meant business. The ring will prove her identity. The courts dare not overthrow its proof. But our young ferrets are walking a little faster. We'll increase our gait."

A few minutes later the three boys reached a corner where they held a short consultation, after which Archy Ray turned into the Bowery leaving the Twin Feds to proceed to the work of watching Bob Benton.

"Hello! two trails!" ejaculated Phlox, looking at Red Rolfe. "Both must be followed. The captain of the squad is moving toward Pet Levi's. Shall I take him?"

"Just as you like."

Archy Ray now had Phlox at his heels, while Red Rolfe was paying his attention to the two Feds.

Phlox did not lose sight of his person for a moment. There was a villainous look in the man's eyes and at times it blazed up into a fierce light as if he was on the eve of rushing forward and overtaking Archy.

Phlox, as we know, was the man who had played the role of Silas Strong at Green Hill, the country home of Mabel Marshall; he was the rascal who had inveigled the young girl to

New York and into the power of the Bowery Vampires, and he could play shrewd games of this sort equal to the best. His only fault was that he sometimes lost his temper, an example of which we have seen at the Vampires' haunt where Mabel learned of the infamous plot against her.

Archy Ray kept on until he saw the establishment kept by Pet Levi the Jew pawnbroker.

As he neared the store a man came out and walked away. This was no unusual circumstance, for the old Jew had many customers, and he was likely to have one at any hour. The young detective had the invitation received a short time before, and it was now the proper time to call for the important interview mentioned in it.

Archy Ray paid no particular attention to the man who had just left the pawnshop. He noticed, however, that he was well-built, quick in his movements, and that he wore a slouch hat that shaded much of his face. The man was lost to sight in a minute, and still followed by Phlox, who made an excellent spy, Archy entered old Levi's shop.

It was the Jew's custom to advance and receive his customers with an unctuous smile peculiarly his own, but this time the young spotter was met with no demonstration of this kind. He noticed, too, that the gas was not burning with its usual brilliance in the store, but the non-appearance of Pet Levi puzzled him most.

Archy Ray walked the full length of the store and looked at the dingy iron safe wherein the old Jew kept his most valuable articles. It was closed.

"Hello! here's my man!" he suddenly ejaculated, and the next moment he was leaning over the counter and facing the pawnbroker who occupied an arm-chair which he completely filled.

This chair was behind the counter and near the safe, and when not busy, Levi was wont to occupy it while he waited for the next customer.

The old fellow's face was partly hidden from the detective's gaze; his chin touched his breast, and Archy was inclined to think that Pet Levi had for once fallen asleep at his post.

"Here I am, Pet, according to your invitation," said the spotter, as he leaned forward and touched the Jew on the shoulder.

There was no movement on the pawnbroker's part. Archy shook him a little, but with the same result. What was the matter?

All at once there flashed through the young detective's head the recollection of the man who had just left the store, the rough-looking figure and the slouched hat.

"I'll get at this!" cried the boy detective, as he sprang nimbly over the counter and landed at the Jew's side. "Look up here, Pet, old fellow. *My God! the man is dead!*"

One look at the face he had raised was enough for Archy Ray. He dropped the head and started back.

Pet Levi had joined his fathers, and the most famous pawnbroker of the Bowery would ply his business no more.

The Jew's face was dark, and the eyeballs possessed a stare that was terrible to behold.

"He has been strangled and the man who did it has just left the store!" cried the young detective. "I answered my summons a minute too late."

He turned toward the door as if he expected to confront the murderer, but he was not there, then he went back to the dead man in the chair and again lifted his head.

"This is a part of the game against the girl," he said. "The old man was going to give me a clew of some kind, but he will never do it now."

Just as Archy finished he was startled by a footstep, and a moment later he was confronted by a man who was leaning over the counter.

"What's the matter with Pet?" asked this man who had a clean face and was well dressed.

"He is dead!"

"Apoplexy?"

"No, murdered—choked to death."

The man looked into Archy's face and laughed.

"Why didn't you leave him the moment you got through with the job?" he said.

"What do you mean?"

The young detective straightened suddenly and his eyes flashed with indignation.

"Oh, come—no innocent dodge, my young robber," was the retort. "The Jew isn't cold yet. This crime has been done within the last ten minutes. You have been here that long. Hang me, if this doesn't beat the latest Parisian sensation! I'll have to hand you over to the police."

"You?"

"Why not? Do you think I am going to let you go when I have caught you at your victim's side? I'm no fool, boy."

Archy Ray could hardly believe that all this was not a dream.

All at once the hands of the man swooped down upon his shoulders like the talons of an eagle and closed there, and before he could resist, he was dragged over the counter by main force and hustled toward the front door.

"Police! police!" shouted the man who held the boy detective with a firm grip and in a moment an officer appeared on the scene.

"I guess you'd better take this boy," said the man, as he thrust Archy toward the officer. "I came in here a moment ago to find Pet Levi dead—murdered as the facts show—and this boy had his hands on his person. When I am wanted I will be found at No. 999 Mulberry. My name is Jacob Wingate."

The hands of the police had already closed about the young detective, and Jacob Wingate was off like a flash.

"That man lies!" exclaimed Archy. "Pet Levi was dead when I came here. I've located that fellow at last. He is Trix's companion. Do you know Trix?"

The officer shook his head.

"We can't be expected to know everybody," he said. "You can't get off by entering a counter-charge. I've got to hold you for the murder of Pet Levi!"

CHAPTER X.

RUN DOWN.

THERE was something in the words of the policeman as they grated harshly on Archy's ears.

Held for murder!

All this time the man who had undoubtedly committed the deed, he of the slouched hat, was making off, and the man, his accomplice, perhaps, Phlox, who had made the infamous accusation, would soon join him.

"You are letting the criminals get away," said the young detective, addressing the officer, who had looked once into Pet Levi's discolored face from across the counter. "I swear that the Jew was dead, dead as a stone, when I got here. I can find the man who did it in less than two hours."

"I can't let you go," was the reply, and Archy saw that he was eyed with a great deal of suspicion. "You will have to go to the station; your case will be attended to there. I don't see why anybody'd want to kill the old Jew."

There was no help for it, and the young detective smothered his rage and was taken to the nearest station.

"They generally hop onto the wrong person," he muttered. "Here I am nabbed for murder on the charge of a man who probably knows all about it himself. This is New York cuteness with a vengeance; but I'll have to put up with it till I can get a hearing. I want the man in the slouched hat."

"Hello!" exclaimed a fine-looking man, who entered the room at that moment and walked to where Archy Ray stood watched by a brace of policemen. "They haven't got your neck in a noose, have they, Archy Ray?"

"Not yet, but they'd like to get it there," was the reply. "Do I look like I'd go and strangle Pet Levi in his curiesity shop?"

"Not by a long sight! Come in here."

The officer took the young spotter into another room and said:

"Now tell all."

For the next few moments Archy Ray talked rapidly to the lieutenant of police who listened attentively and did not lose a syllable.

"Don't you see? The charge kept me from following the man in the slouched hat," said Archy as he finished. "I was about to rush from the store for that purpose when I was collared by the man whom I saw in Madam Bluebird's trap with Trix last night."

"The man in the bad hat couldn't have been Trix, eh?"

"No; he was built too heavily for that."

For a moment neither Archy nor the lieutenant spoke.

"I have settled down to one thing," suddenly said the latter, touching the boy's shoulder as he looked into his eyes. "The man you saw leave the store killed the Jew."

"That is plain to me," said the young spotter. "Are you going to hold me?"

"Certainly not, on the charge put forth by the man who said he lives at 999 Mulberry. I have telephoned to the station for information concerning 999 and its people. We shall hear presently. The papers have got a sensation

again for Pet Levi was the best known Jew in the city. Hello! There's the answer now!"

Archy Ray saw the lieutenant step to the telephone box where he listened for a few moments. Suddenly a smile overspread his face and he turned to the boy.

"Just as I expected. No such a person as Jacob Wingate lives at 999."

"I would have bet my head on that," cried Archy Ray. "That settles the question of his identity. He is Trix's companion."

"You can go now but we shall want your testimony before long, perhaps."

"I'm always on hand."

Meantime, the death of Pet Levi had created a great sensation in the immediate neighborhood. The shop was assailed by a crowd that blockaded the sidewalk and gave the hastily summoned police a great deal of trouble. Fifty people had as many different theories about the crime, and not a few said that the Jew had dropped dead from apoplexy and had not been murdered.

Archy Ray went back to the scene of the crime. He knew that Red Rolfe's haunt was next door to the pawnshop and it needed watching.

At the same moment in a certain drinking saloon nearly a mile from Pet Levi's two men sat at a little table.

"What did you do it for, anyhow?" asked one.

"He had us foul," was the answer. "That infamous old Jew listened at a certain hole behind his counter last night and heard us talk. He said enough to Reddy this morning to tell me that he knew too much. What did you say you were going to do with him?"

The person addressed started slightly.

"Come, Phlox," laughed the other. "Own up to your expressed intentions. You threatened to choke Pet Levi yourself."

"I did, but—"

"Well, you're growling now because somebody else did," was the response. "We weren't safe while that old sheeny knew what he did. He had us in his clutches, and just think of being in the clutches of a man like Levi."

"It isn't a pleasant thought, that's a fact—"

"Of course not! He laughed in my face the moment he saw me," interrupted the other. "It was more than I could stand. Then the opportunity was a brilliant one, and more than I could resist. He didn't squirm much. It's good-by, Pet Levi. Somebody else will take his place and the business will go on. They won't hold the boy on your charge?"

"Not long, but long enough to give us a chance."

"I wonder what's going on about the establishment now?"

The speaker pushed his chair back and got up.

"Are you going back?" asked the other, staring at him.

"Yes, down to Reddy's."

"With that hat on?"

"No."

At the same time the last speaker dropped the slouch hat he wore and took another from under his coat, which, when he had smoothed its creases, fit him exactly and gave him a totally different appearance. Then he removed a false beard from his face and stowed it away with the discarded hat, while he laughed.

"If we don't prove a match for all the boy spotters in New York, hang me for a saint! I've been in many a scrape before, Phlox, and none ever held me long. Remember that we are going to handle the hundred thousand—when the Jersey dove is Trix's wife!"

The two went out and walked rapidly down the Bowery, where the curious and rapidly augmenting crowd still blocked the sidewalk.

"At the first opportunity we slip into the haunt," whispered Phlox. "Keep your peepers peeled for detectives. Maybe the boy has been turned loose and is here watching for developments."

"He doesn't want to fool with me," was the hissing reply. "If he does, he will find at his pullet throat the hand that troubled Pet Levi's windpipe."

Nobody seemed to regard the two men with suspicion, and before long they had a chance to slip into the house next to the old Jew's shop.

They hurried to a room where a dim light burned, but it was empty.

"Reddy has got wind of something. He isn't here," said Phlox.

"And the girl?"

"We'll look for her."

Several minutes later the two reached a door which they opened and Phlox exclaimed:

"The Jersey dove has fled also."

"Then look for a message."

Phlox left the room and walked back to the first apartment entered where he touched a dark button in the wall, and a small panel slid to one side.

In an instant his fingers had clutched a paper which he unfolded as he bounded toward the gaslight and he and his companions read as follows.

"The death of Pet Levi takes us away. It was a bad move, I fear, but the old rascal had us in his power. We have gone to 778 in Bob's carriage. Come to us at once. R. R."

"It is a good stroke!" exclaimed Phlox, looking up. "Reddy always was good on emergencies. But I don't see how he got away with the girl without being seen."

"The underground passage to Keen Billy's boarding-house," suggested his companion.

"Perhaps," was the reply, and the message was torn to fragments, chewed for a moment and thrown away. "To 778 we go. After tomorrow night, when the girl will be Trix's wife, we will snap our fingers at fortune."

Once more the two men reached the sidewalk and looked at the crowd still discussing the murder of the old Jew.

The man who had worn the slouch hat seemed to be attracted by the sight.

"Does the old place draw you back?" whispered Phlox, catching his companion's arm.

"Heavens, no! I don't want to go back there. Come! I want to face the rest of the gang."

In a moment Phlox and his companion had turned away but the next second they heard a voice they were not expecting.

"Halt! You are the very men I have been looking for," said the stern voice that struck their ears. "Don't attempt to draw a weapon. I have the drop on two of the Bowery Vampires and the greatest rascals in New York."

"The young ferret!" muttered Phlox's friend with a scowl that darkened his already unhand-some face. "I should have waited in Pet Levi's for him."

Archy Ray stood before the twain with leveled revolver, and a flash of triumph in his eyes. He was certain that he had already cornered the wearer of the slouch hat, and the man who had accused him of killing the Jew.

"This is my hour, gentlemen," he went on. "We will see what comes of this game against the dove from New Jersey."

The two men exchanged lightning glances and looked like tigers ready for the spring. But all at once two police came up, and the young detective turned his prisoners over.

"These men belong to Red Rolfe's gang of human vampires, and they know how and why Pet Levi died," he said. "On the person of that one, if he has not thrown it away, you will find a slouch hat which I can identify, and that man is Jacob Wingate, the companion of Trix."

In an instant the two men were in the hands of the police, and Archy Ray was turning away when some one sprang to his side.

"We made it pay in shadowing Bob Benton," was the exclamation that greeted the young detective, who confronted his pal Fred Webb. "The young driver got another job to-night. We have found Mabel!"

Archy Ray could hardly repress an ejaculation of triumph.

"I left Fred guarding the new haunt," young Webb went on. "We saw Mabel enter it under Red Rolfe's protection, and Bob Benton is where we can lay hands on him when we want him."

This was good news.

CHAPTER XI.

RED ROLFE'S TACTICS.

THE Twin Freds had shadowed Bob Benton, the young cab driver, to some purpose, and the report that Fred Webb delivered to Archy on the street near Pet Levi's establishment made known the result.

They had followed Bob to a spot not far remote from Red Rolfe's haunt, where he was soon joined by the ex-smuggler and a woman closely veiled and under his command. The two entered the cab, when it was driven off with the Twin Freds hanging on behind.

There would have been a scene if the boys had been discovered on their dangerous perch, but they were not, and they had the satisfaction of seeing the female conducted to a certain house which they knew from its situation must be another of Red Rolfe's numerous places.

Fred Martin was left on guard while his companion went back with the report we have heard him make.

It was a stroke of excellent fortune, and

Archy Ray, who had just secured the arrest of Phlox and the probable murderer of the old Jew, was inclined to rejoice beforehand over another triumph which would soon be secured.

Fred Martin, who had been left on duty, was determined that the new quarters should be vigilantly guarded, and for this purpose he took up his station under a shed directly opposite. His position enabled her to see the front of the suspicious house, for a lamp-post which stood near showed him the lower half of the front and left the main entrance in plain view.

The post of the young detective was lost in shadow by the drooping roof of the shed, and so well was he concealed that occasional passers-by did not notice him.

"We've run the Bowery Vampires down at last, and the girl is located," said Fred, while he waited for Archy who was expected to return with the third member of the firm. "Nobody enters or leaves that house without being seen. We've got you foul at last, Red Rolfe, and the Jersey pigeon will not be plucked, after all."

For some time the boy on guard saw nothing suspicious, but at last the door across the way opened and a man stepped out.

"Reddy himself!" ejaculated Fred.

The man had the physical proportions of the head of the Bowery gang, but Fred saw that he now wore a full beard, but he did not doubt that he saw before him Red Rolfe himself.

For several moments the man stood on the step as if waiting for some one, then he started off suddenly and disappeared in a little while.

"It is not likely that he has left Mabel alone," said the young spotter. "If he has, she is locked up in some room from which escape without assistance is impossible. My post is here till the boys come."

If his gaze could have followed the man who had left the house, he would have seen him enter a dark alley, where he leaned against a house and drew his boots. Casting them aside, he put on another pair which would not warn any one of his approach, and then gliding from the alley he crossed the street some distance below Fred's station.

The young detective had seen none of these movements, and in a short time Red Rolfe was moving toward him with a fierce light in the eyes that gleamed under his hat.

Edging toward the building, he came along while Fred had his eyes on the house opposite. He soon saw the boy detective in spite of the shadows that screened him.

All at once with the spring of a tiger he landed before Fred, and the next second his hand descended upon his shoulder.

"On the watch, eh?" he laughed glaring down into the boy's face. "Don't show your spunk in any manner, or I'll leave you a subject for the coroner. Followed me to-night, eh? Whar ar' yer pals—for I take you for one o' the three Chamber street ferrets."

Fred at first said nothing. He looked up into the man's face and saw the sandy mustache that proclaimed his identity.

It was Red Rolfe!

"Come along!" continued the Bowery Vampire dragging the boy off. "Don't try to get away or I'll make it unpleasant for you."

Fred Martin glanced down at the villain's feet.

"He came upon me like a panther; he changed shoes somewhere for the purpose; I guess I am in for it, but I'll not object very much if he takes me to the house where Mabel is."

Red Rolfe soon showed an intention of doing this very thing for he crossed the street and moved on the building he had lately left.

"That is right! Take me to Mabel if you dare, Reddy, and I'll show you a game that may open your eyes," muttered Fred.

In a little while the boy detective found himself on the steps of the very house he had watched, and a minute later he was its inmate.

The door that closed behind him shut with a snap, and he found himself in a dimly-lighted hallway from which he was led into an adjoining room where he was suddenly released.

Red Rolfe threw himself upon a chair and looked at his captive.

Fred stood in the middle of the room and faced the man who, for genuine desperateness, had no superior in the whole city.

"Doing a little detective work, aren't you?" laughed Red Rolfe.

"What if I am?"

"That depends on who you're working against."

"Against you, think you?" asked the boy.

"It looks that way. Do you know me?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"You're Red Rolfe."

"By heavens! I am nobody else!" cried the desperado, springing up and coming toward Fred who instinctively recoiled. "We might as well play an open game."

"Just as you say," said the boy.

"Open it shall be! You can no more beat us than you can swim the sea. I don't want your life unless you persist in your present course."

"If I refuse to leave the trail, what?"

"Oh, that lies in your own hands," was the response. "I'll give you a chance. Go to your wall pocket and open the door."

The Bowery rough pointed as he spoke to a door in the wall, and the boy looked at it, but did not move.

"Won't, eh? Then I'll do the job myself," he said, and three strides carried him to the little door, which he threw open, revealing a shelf on which were writing materials.

Clutching these in one hand, he came toward the dilapidated table that occupied the middle of the room.

"Take this pen, boy," he exclaimed, glancing at the young spotter; "take it, and write what I dictate."

"How far will this thug carry on this game?" murmured Fred, as he mechanically took the proffered pen. "He shall not draw me from this trail by any foolish agreement."

"Now, write: 'I solemnly swear, in the presence—'"

"Never!" interrupted the boy detective, throwing down the pen, and stepping back with a flash of indignation in his eyes. "I am not to be driven off by an oath. You don't catch me that way, Red Rolfe!"

"The Old Harry, we don't!" exclaimed the Bowery Vampire. "But wait till you know what I want written."

"I will not! I sign no papers by coercion!"

"Oh, you don't?" laughed the rascal, with a very sarcastic sneer. "You don't put your 'John Hancock' to any documents to-night, hey?"

"Not for you!"

"I guess that's plain enough," laughed Red Rolfe. "I was giving you a chance, boy."

"A chance for what?"

"For your life!"

The three words had a strange sound. Fred Martin glanced toward the windows that looked out upon the street, and saw that they were closely shuttered. There were no windows behind him, nothing but a door, which he had a right to suppose was locked.

"There's no getting out of this trap, my street Norway!" laughed the man, following the boy detective's glances. "I can make this house your dwelling-place till Gabriel sounds his trump, and," he leaned forward till his face almost touched Fred's—"and I will do it if you don't sign the oath to leave the trail now and forever!"

"I sign no papers," said the boy, with a calmness that seemed to surprise Red Rolfe. "If this house is to become my eternal abode, you may begin to prepare it for such."

"Think I won't, eh?" cried the Vampire, and his hand clutched the young spotter's arm. "I tell you here, ferret, that you've got into the last burrow. Let me show you."

Fred was jerked across the room and into another adjoining it. This apartment was smaller than the first, with a lower ceiling and a carpetless floor. On the wall, out of reach of Fred's hands, was an illuminated dial, which had the hands and the numerals of a genuine clock. It gave the room the only light it had.

"This is a house full of mysteries and danger. There isn't another like it in New York," said Red Rolfe. "See! I lift my hand and the clock goes to work."

As he spoke the Bowery rough raised his right hand, and Fred heard the ticking of a clock.

"If you will watch those hands you will see them move," continued Red Rolfe, pointing to the illuminated dial. "In one hour they will cover the twelfth figure, though it will not be twelve o'clock, as you know. Now, boy, I give you another chance. Will you sign the oath?"

"No!"

The young spotter did not hesitate; he spoke the syllable clearly and with an emphasis that startled the ex-smuggler.

"All right!" he said. "I have given you the last chance. If you look for rescue by human power, you look for something that will not come. Keep your eyes on that dial, for when the hands cover the twelve, something will happen!"

Fred instinctively turned to the dial again; then he heard a door open and shut, and he was alone.

CHAPTER XII. THE DEATH DIAL.

"MUST I stand here and watch that dial?" exclaimed Fred Martin, whose ears were assailed by the ticking of the unseen pendulum.

He saw that the hands of the dial were creeping toward the twelfth numeral, and remembered that Red Rolfe had said that "something" would happen when the spot was reached.

What was it to be?

The young detective believed that some danger menaced him, something terrible, dimly shadowed by the Bowery Vampire's words, and this feeling fastened as the clock ticked on.

"I'll demolish the infernal mechanism!" he suddenly cried, and looked about for some piece of furniture with which he could assault the dial.

But the ex-smuggler had provided well against all such assaults, for the room did not contain even a chair, and Fred was compelled to relinquish his intention.

Not a sound came from the other part of the house, and the ceaseless ticking of the hidden mechanism kept the young detective alive to a knowledge of his peril.

He went to the door by which Red Rolfe had left the room and listened. If there were any people beside himself in the house, he did not hear them; the silence would have been something awful were it not for the ticks of the danger clock.

More than once the boy threw a look of rage at the dial over whose face the hands moved silently but with blood-chilling certainty. Oh, for a chair, a heavy bar, for a moment.

"Keep your eye on the death dial or sign the paper presented to you!" said a voice that seemed to come from some place behind the clock.

The young spotter sprang toward the wall with clinched fists as he indignantly exclaimed: "You may set your clock faster if you like! I sign no oath to leave the trail we have struck!"

The voice died away within the walls that encompassed the boy prisoner, and but one word came back from behind the dial.

"Fool!"

"What cannot be averted must be met!" said Fred. "In fifteen minutes the hands will reach the place mentioned by Red Rolfe, and I will know what is to happen. When Archy and Fred come and find me gone, what will they do? Will they think that I have fallen into the clutches of the Bowery leeches, or will they look for me elsewhere than in this den?"

Meanwhile Archy Ray and Fred Webb had reached the street whereon stood the mysterious house, and, as a matter of course, had failed to find Martin at his post.

"Here is a bad go," ejaculated Fred, looking into Archy's face. "He is not here. He was to have remained here till we came."

"May be circumstances took him off on a new trail."

There was no reply. Fred Webb gazed in silence at the place where he had left his young friend, and did not move until Archy's voice roused him.

"So that is the house across there?" asked the head of the detective firm.

"That is the one. We saw a young girl—Mabel, of course—enter it, guarded by Red Rolfe."

"If they left Fred would naturally have followed. There was nothing else for him to do."

"That is true," was the answer. "He would be here if nobody has left the house. My opinion is that Fred has gone off on an important trail. In that event we—"

"Look yonder!" interrupted Fred Webb, clutching Archy's wrist. "The old house has a caller."

This was true as the two boys saw, for a man had mounted the steps in front of the house and was waiting to be admitted.

"That isn't Red Rolfe," whispered Archy.

"It is neither Phlox nor Julius."

"No; they are in the hands of the police."

"Then it is Trix."

Just at this moment the door opened a little and the visitor glided into the house.

"Gone!" said Archy. "I'd give a good deal to be at his heels. Of course that door locked itself behind him."

"Then Red Rolfe is at home. Now how do you account for Fred's disappearance?"

The shrewd young spotter was silent and Fred saw him gazing thoughtfully at the house that seemed to hold some unsolvable mystery.

"There is one way to get at this," he said, at last. "It is taking the bull by the horns."

"The police?" queried Fred Webb.

"Yes. We are reasonably certain that

Mabel is in that house, also that Red Rolfe and Trix are under the same roof. I wanted to rescue the girl and baffle the Bowery Vampires without calling in the cops, but I'm afraid we'll have to fall back on them. Now that Pet Levi is dead and Julius and Phlox under arrest, as Trix will tell Red Rolfe, the gang will inaugurate desperate measures. We must work! Here, take this to 300 Mulberry," and Archy drew a card from an inner pocket and wrote there on a single line:

"Six men to follow the bearer.

RAY."

"You will hand this to the first man you meet at 300," continued Archy, thrusting the card into Fred's hands. "I will be here unless something extraordinary happens. Go! This is the most momentous part of the game."

Fred Webb darted off like a startled deer and disappeared in a moment, while Archy Ray turned his gaze upon the house across the street.

"I'd give my head almost if that lamp was out," he said, as he looked. "I could then get up to the windows and maybe get a glimpse at what is going on inside."

But the gas burned on much to his annoyance and he was compelled to keep his shaded station under the shed where Fred Martin had been pounced upon by Red Rolfe.

If he could have glided into the house at the heels of the man whom he had decided was Trix, he would have been both startled and rewarded.

The man who admitted the nocturnal visitor was Red Rolfe himself, and his eyes opened in surprise when they fell upon the caller, who was a young man quick of motion and good looking.

"By gammon! you left the Bowery in good time, I should say," laughed the visitor, before Reddy could speak. "There are only two of us now—you and I—Reddy."

"How? What has happened?"

"The cops have collared Phlox and Julius."

"No!"

"Crown me king of the cannibals, if I lie!" was the response. "Why didn't Phlox choke that young Chambers street ferret, instead of turning him over to the police on a charge which he ought to have known wouldn't hold water? He caught them both."

"That boy?"

"Yes."

Red Rolfe said nothing, but his teeth fairly cracked behind his lips.

"They fell upon Pet Levi a little too soon," Trix went on.

"I should say they did, but the old Jew knew too much, and was in a fair way to prove dangerous," said Reddy. "They won't find us here. The only ferret who nosed this place out is watching the dial."

"Who is he?"

"One of the three young spotters who gave us a peck of trouble last summer. I nabbed him at his post across the street, slipped upon him when he wasn't expecting anybody, and chucked him in here before he caught his breath."

"And the girl?"

"Oh, I got her here without any trouble. When I knew that Pet Levi had gone to his fathers, I had to get up and dust. Bob got the message I sent by telephone, and fetched us here in a hurry. We took the carriage a full square from the house, but somehow or other the rat I've got cooped up smelled us out."

"Rode between the wheels, probably."

"I don't know, and now I don't care, for he is done for."

"I would like to take a look at him," said Trix. "I can see him from the secret panel, you know."

"But not before the dial works, perhaps."

"Let us try it."

The two men started down the corridor, but when they were near the end of it a strange grating sound was heard, but only for a moment.

"Too late!" said Red Rolfe. "The rat is dead!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A DANGEROUS BLUEBIRD.

OPPOSITE the house occupied by the Bowery Vampires stood Archy Ray waiting for the officers after whom he had sent Fred Webb with a brief message.

He was destined to wait a long time, for the minutes passed away and the boy detective did not return.

Archy grew slightly nervous under the shed. What if Red Rolfe should get wind of his presence and decamp?

"It cannot be that anything has happened to interfere with the delivery of my message," the

young spotter said. "Fred knows where 300 Mulberry is, and the force knows him."

Meanwhile nothing had occurred to tell Archy that the inmates of the shadowed house had detected his presence. No one had left it since Fred's departure, and nobody had been admitted. He was certain that Mabel Marshall was still a prisoner there, and he was anxious to rescue the girl before she could be taken to other quarters.

This messenger had, however, met with the most unexpected of accidents, and one which it is our duty to record.

In order to reach Mulberry at the point where he wanted to strike it, Fred Webb was obliged to cross the Bowery in the vicinity of Madam Bluebird's delectable trap.

More than a hundred times perhaps he had inspected the exterior of the most famous house in that quarter and he knew from hearsay that the interior was no safe place for any one who was not "acquainted" with the proprietress and her coterie of special friends.

He had heard from Archy's lips the story of Madam Bluebird's incarceration in her own cellar, and when he saw the old house he could not repress a laugh at her ludicrous mishap.

The young detective crossed the Bowery half a square below the trap and came toward it in a rapid walk. He was moving by the nearest point upon the police head-quarters, and did not intend to stop until he reached them.

The immediate vicinity of Madam Bluebird's residence was comparatively quiet, but all at once a series of shrill cries came from beyond the front door, and mingled with the heavy blows of a strap were the piteous appeals of some one for mercy.

Instinctively the boy stopped and the next moment he had taken several steps toward the house.

"The merciless vixen is beating some child in her employ," he said while he listened to the cries that seemed to emanate from the hall. "If the gate of her castle wasn't barred to me, I'd make her let up. It is more than I can stand as it is."

He raised his fist to strike the door when the blows suddenly ceased, and the next instant the portal was pulled open, and he was looking up into the florid face and flashing eyes of Madam Bluebird herself.

He saw that she held a heavy strap in her hand and a second's glance beyond her Amazonian figure showed him a human form prostrate on the floor.

"What's wanting?" cried the tigress, before the startled boy could greet her. "Want to interfere with an honest woman's business, eh? Come in, and I'll give you a pint o' strap oil that'll do you good."

A hand shot forward like a huge claw, and although Fred was agile, he was not quick enough for it.

Before he could spring from the step he was seized and jerked inside and the door shut.

"Don't try to get loose!" laughed Madam Bluebird, as she held the boy with a grip of steel. "Mebbe you're a pal of the young ferret who got into my house the other night on mischief bent. I'll show you what it is to listen at my door! Oh, I'm a hawk and not a Bluebird when I'm out o' humor!"

Fred might as well have struggled in the paws of a lioness as in the arms of Madam Bluebird. He had been dragged into a side room out of sight of the girl's figure lying in the hall, and the gas showed him the terrible anger that controlled the woman.

All at once Madam Bluebird pushed him away and said sternly.

"Take off your coat!"

One look at the strap dangling from her right hand was enough to make the lips of the young detective meet.

He drew his well-built figure to its true height and looked defiance at the woman.

"You dare not touch me with that strap," he said.

Madam Bluebird laughed.

"I can do anything here," she exclaimed. "I want to show you that I don't allow street rats to listen at the Bluebird's cage. Take off that coat!"

As she spoke, the Amazon lifted the strap and took a step forward.

She towered before Fred like a mountain, and one blow looked enough to crush him. However, he stood his ground as if he had planted himself to remain where he was.

"I will not remove my clothes to be branded by your infamous strap!" he said, coolly. "If I am to be whipped it shall be in all my garments!"

"Very well!" laughed Madam Bluebird. "I will make you feel it through all your duds!"

The strap was lifted suddenly above her head, and the boy detective mechanically threw up his hands.

All at once down came the strap and the boy's arms were knocked aside as though they had been straws. The leather seemed to cut to the bone, but Fred courageously suppressed a cry of pain and sprung at the Amazon's throat.

He was not allowed to reach the prize, for he was seized and pushed back, and the strap laid with emphasis across his face! It drew blood. Infuriated by the blow the young detective flew again at his persecutor, and this time succeeded in grasping the strap which he tried to wrench from her grip.

"You'll not get this leather in any way than on your flesh!" hissed Madam Bluebird as she struggled to tear the boy loose.

"I'll see that you'll never play spy any more in this city! I'll make you the eternal companion of the minx lying in the hall!"

"If you can!" cried Fred.

The struggle lasted for a few minutes, when the young spotter succeeded in getting the strap and freeing himself from the Amazon.

Stepping back he held the prize behind him and laughed in the face of the infuriated woman. Madam Bluebird was the picture of rage.

All at once she glanced toward a bureau that occupied one corner of the room at Fred's left, and seemed about to spring at it.

"Not yet!" said the boy, stepping quickly between her and the bureau. "You are not going to supply yourself with another weapon," he said. "I have the strap now, Madam Bluebird, and I will not hesitate to improve your beauty if you drive me to it."

"You're a little coward!" flashed the woman, shaking her fist in Fred's face.

"Oh, yes, I'm anything but a gentleman in your eyes," he laughed in a manner that increased her anger.

"I'll thrash the floor with you!"

"To night, Madam Bluebird?"

"Now!"

"Very well; here I am!"

The young spotter brought the strap forward and put himself in a position to resent any attack that might be made; but the mistress of the trap did not advance.

"If I should lay this strap across your face, you won't get to Pet Levi's funeral," continued Fred.

Madam Bluebird uttered a cry of astonishment.

"Is the old Jew dead?"

"Dead! murdered!"

"Heavens! who did it?"

"A man named Julius, assisted by a rascal named Phlox."

A wild cry came from the Amazon's lips, and the young detective saw her cheeks lose color.

"Those two men are your friends," Fred went on. "They have fallen into the hands of the police. The murder of the old Jew is connected in some manner with the scheme against the girl from New Jersey. The officers will sift things to the bottom. Red Rolfe has been tracked to his new hiding-place, and before the end of an hour the game will have been played out. How does the prospect strike you?"

Madam Bluebird listened to these words with a countenance that was almost ghastly.

Fred saw that the death of the Jew was a revelation to her.

Suddenly she flashed up and shut her hands defiantly.

"I dare them to try to connect me with the death of Levi!" she ejaculated.

"You'll have to prove, then, that you don't know Julius and Phlox; that the Jersey dove wasn't once a prisoner in this very house, and that you can't do, Madam Bluebird. I guess they'll draw the strings on you."

There was no reply.

The look of the woman seemed to become a stare.

"I have never been in the hands of the police and I will never get there!" she said at last.

"Because just beyond them lies Sing Sing, eh?" smiled Fred.

"Worse than that!"

"What?"

"No difference."

She stepped back and sunk upon a sofa against the wall.

"You can do just what you please, boy," she said. "You can summon the police if you wish. They'll find me here when they come."

"I may call them in. I think your crimes deserve the visit," was the response, and the

next minute the young detective was in the hall.

No girlish figure was seen on the floor now, and it was not his intention to search the house for the victim of Madam Bluebird's rage. He went to the door and rushed out upon the street.

Already his adventure had delayed him more than half an hour, and when he thought of Archy waiting for him opposite Red Rolfe's haunt he darted off like a deer.

A short time afterward he appeared suddenly at 300 Mulberry and delivered his message.

"Six men, eh?" said the officer, who glanced over it. "There must be some castle to storm."

"I don't know but there is," was the young detective's reply. "Can Archy have them?"

"Certainly! That boy never draws on us in vain."

In less than five minutes Fred Webb and six men were moving toward the spot where he had left Archy Ray. He told them on the way that they had run Red Rolfe down, and the men who had become interested in the story of the girl, were eager for work.

"Here is where I left Archy," said Fred, reaching the shed. "But I don't—"

"Oh, here he is—on his face on the step!" cried one of the men.

"Dead?" exclaimed the horrified Fred.

"It looks that way!"

CHAPTER XIV.

KEENNESS AT FAULT.

As if struck at the same moment by the same impulse, the little crowd that surrounded Archy Ray looked toward the house across the street.

"That is the house to which we tracked Red Rolfe and the Jersey girl," said Fred Webb ere he turned to the young detective, who was unconscious but not dead.

The men glanced at their leader for orders.

"It is not probable that we will find the Vampires there," he said, "so a few moments here with this boy will not be time lost."

Archie was examined by one of the men who knew something about wounds, and a brief inspection showed that he had been grazed on the temple by a bullet which had nearly terminated his career.

The amateur surgeon laid his finger on the deep and ugly looking wound and looked up at his companions.

"What is likely to occur—death?" inquired Fred eagerly.

"I think not, but these are the kind of shots that produce results worse than death," was the answer.

"You don't mean to say that Archy will be insane when he recovers?"

"He may not be able to tell us how this occurred."

"We'll find out!" cried Fred Webb resolutely. "I am for trying that house right away. Come! Let me be the first to meet the Vampires whom we run down to-night!"

The men were eager to cross the street, and if their leader had not given the command to advance they would have followed the boy.

"Hello! look yonder," suddenly cried Fred Webb before the foremost man reached the gutter. "The house has let one man out."

This was true, for the door of Red Rolfe's retreat had opened in the faces of all, and a man had stepped coolly forth and was walking leisurely away, as if the eyes of six men were not upon him.

"Hello, there!" suddenly called out the lieutenant of the little squad, and as he stepped toward the middle of the street, he drew a revolver. "We want to see you for a moment, sir."

The man stopped and turned with an air of surprise.

The whole band was almost in the middle of the street, and the lieutenant was advancing rapidly upon him.

"Were you speaking to me?" asked the halted man, as the policeman stepped upon the sidewalk.

"Yes, sir."

In a moment the strange man, who was still young, well-dressed and rather good-looking, was the prisoner of the police.

Fred Webb pressed eagerly forward.

Was it Trix?

Over one eye was a fresh wound that still bled, and the prisoner burst into a laugh as he pointed to it.

"Served me right, I guess," he said. "I got into the wrong house awhile ago, and in getting out, I got a reminder of my mistake. Funny, wasn't it? Well, it is a lesson for Johnny Clane. Do you want me, gents?"

The lieutenant of police glanced at Fred Webb, who had studied the prisoner thoroughly in the light of the lamp. The boy shook his head.

"This man is neither Red Rolfe or Trix," he said, in response to the inquiring look. "I never saw him before."

"Oh, you're looking for some one, I see," said the prisoner. "Maybe he's the fellow who wrote his autograph over my eye."

"In that house?"

"Yes."

"Who did it?"

"That's what I'd like to know," laughed the wounded man.

"What was he like?"

"I didn't get to study his physiognomy. When I found I was in the wrong house I tried to apologize, but the tenant wanted me to get out without doing that. I replied in spirit, when he proceeded to send me to the floor."

"Knocked you down?" queried one of the men.

"I should say he did. I don't know how long I laid there, for I was left after that to get out at my leisure."

"And you don't know what the man—your assailant was like?"

"Like a sledge-hammer, I should judge."

"No foolishness," said the lieutenant, sternly.

"All right; perhaps you could find him by inquiring at the door," said John Clane. "If I am not wanted further, I would like to go to my boarding-house and doctor my pet. I got on the wrong street. These thoroughfares look alike to me after dark, and especially when a fellow has several cocktails ahead. I live on the next street, No. 689."

"We'll take you back to identify the man who assaulted you," the officer said.

"I think I can do that if I get my eyes on him. And if you don't hold me, gents, I'll proceed to array his peepers in unrelieved mourning."

The suspicious house was but a few steps away, and the lieutenant, a courageous man of thirty-five, went up the steps and pulled the bell.

Nobody was bestowing any particular attention upon Mr. John Clane at this moment, and did not therefore see the singular smile that lurked at the corners of his mouth.

There was no response to the bell for a moment, and the lieutenant was getting out of patience when the knob turned and the door opened.

Before the policeman stood a man who must have been seventy-five or eighty years of age. His hair and beard were very white, and a stooped figure confirmed his age.

"What is it, gentlemen?" he inquired, in a squeaky voice, like that sometimes peculiar to a man of great age. "I see I am indebted to the police for this visit. Are you going to come in?"

The lieutenant and his followers looked surprised.

"That's not the man I saw," said John Clane, in an audible whisper at the lieutenant's shoulder.

"But you were assaulted in this house?"

"Yes, by some one."

Meanwhile the old man was holding the door open, but the officer did not step forward. It was evident that he was almost at his wits' end.

"I've never been visited by the police before and I've lived here twenty-three years," the old man went on. "You'll find my name in the City Directory—Adam Andrews, repairer of watches in a small way. You are at liberty to inspect my workshop, gentlemen."

"Go in," said a voice at the lieutenant's side, and a glance downward showed him Fred Webb's lips trembling with the last word.

The next moment the officer crossed the threshold, followed by his companions and Clane.

"It's not much of a shop," continued the old man, leading the party into a room to the right, where he waved his hand toward a bench littered with a watchmaker's tools. "Here we are, in the workshop of Adam Andrews, the oldest watch-fixer in the city."

Fred Webb looked amazed. Could it be that he had seen Red Rolfe bring the missing girl to the home of this quiet old man whose very features bore the stamp of honesty? Was this old watch-tinker in league with the Vampires of the Bowery?

"Do you live alone?" asked the lieutenant.

"No; my daughter is asleep in the room overhead," was the answer. "My son Paul was killed by an accident on Broadway last summer. You may have heard of it, gentlemen."

The lieutenant of police shook his head.

"We may have invaded the wrong house," he said.

"Perhaps. When Adam Andrews must be visited by the police, he wants his gray hairs to go down to the grave," responded the watch-tinker, solemnly.

"What do you say now?" said the lieutenant, turning suddenly upon Fred Webb, who was not the least surprised person in the room.

"Haven't we got into the wrong house?"

"I cannot think that we have. Archy was found where I left him, and the house he was watching was directly opposite his post."

"Whose house, boy?" ejaculated the old man, looking into the young spotter's face.

"I don't know whose, but the one we tracked Red Rolfe to," was the reply.

"Who is Red Rolfe—do you know?" exclaimed old Adam, facing the lieutenant. "This must be a dream; and yet, I appear to be awake. Wait! I'll call Lucy."

"No; do not rouse your daughter," said the lieutenant. "There must be a mistake somewhere. We are hunting a man well known to the police, a foreigner and an ex-smuggler, named Red Rolfe. We have relied on the work of this boy here. If you will accept an apology for our disturbing you, Mr. Andrews, we will go."

"No apology. I know that mistakes are liable to happen," said the old man. "But I shall never forget that my house was mistaken for the home of an ex-smuggler. It'll frighten Lucy, dear child, when she awakens. Let me apologize for not being able to render your search successful."

The little party began to retire from the room.

All of a sudden a significant look passed between John Clane and the watch-tinker. It was the work of the tenth part of a second.

"I must have got my gash elsewhere," the young man said to the lieutenant. "That old man didn't do it. There must have been something in that last glass."

"I think there was," snapped the lieutenant, who was getting out of humor by the embarrassing outcome of the adventure. "My advice to you is to hunt up the right house, and go to bed."

"Spit me for a gutter-snipe if I don't!" was the answer, and when the speaker reached the sidewalk, he bowed to the party and skipped away.

The old watch-tinker followed his visitors to the door, and bowed them out. The lieutenant was the last to reach the walk, and his eyes fell upon the boy detective, who was looking at the front of the house with strange interest.

"Well, how does it look to you now?" asked the officer, as his touch called Fred Webb from his abstraction. "Didn't we tackle the wrong house, my boy?"

"No, sir!" was the quick response. "I will stake my life on the assertion that I saw Red Rolfe and Mabel Marshall, and later on Trix, enter that house. The more I look at it the more certain grows my conviction. We made no mistake as to the place."

The lieutenant shook his head.

"Let us cross over to where Archy is," said Fred. "He may be himself by this time."

The party crossed the street to the shed where the young Chambers street ferret had been left with the amateur police surgeon.

"How is it, Archy?" exclaimed Fred, springing to his friend's side.

"Oh, I'm getting all right again. Did you find them?"

"No; we found an old man—a watch-tinker—named Adam Andrews. He took us into his workshop, and offered to call his daughter up. Not a trace of Red Rolfe or Mabel. The lieutenant here thinks we hit the wrong house."

"You went to the right one," was the answer. "I was watching it, when a jet of fire seemed to leap from one of the windows. After that I knew no more."

"What do you say now?" cried Fred, looking triumphantly into the lieutenant's face.

"It is very strange, but I do not feel at liberty to invade the house again under the circumstances."

Archy Ray seemed to grind his teeth.

"There has been another shrewd game played," he said. "If you had searched the house thoroughly you might have made several startling discoveries."

The officer did not reply and showed no disposition to follow up the suggestion conveyed in the young spotter's words.

At the same time the man called John Clane was laughing to himself in a certain by street not far away.

"Hoodwinked them by one of the cutest games ever played in Gotham!" he exclaimed. "When a set of coppers don't know an artificial cut, I'm on a sure road to a saintship! and old Adam? Wasn't that role played to a T? Now I guess the Jersey beauty will become Mrs. Trix, and we'll rake in the golden stakes."

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST BOLD PLAY.

It was a game well played, but the players were bound to find their fortunes wrecked at the end.

The two men arrested by the police at Archy's suggestion in front of the Vampire's haunt in the Bowery maintained a sullen silence when confronted in the station house.

Julius and Phlox were old friends, and when they found the charge of murder placed against their names they looked at one another, but said nothing.

When pressed about Red Rolfe, Julius finally declared doggedly that he knew no such a person, and Phlox, *alias* Silas Strong, answered in the same strain.

If the two men had confessed to the truth the adventure of Fred Webb and the police at the watch-tinker's house might have had a different ending. As it was, as we have seen, the authorities had been thrown off the scent in a shrewd manner, and the Bowery villains seemed in a fair way to carry out their game against the girl.

Archy Ray went back with the police in no good frame of mind. He had recovered from the effects of the shot fired from the window of the mysterious house although he was dejected over the result of the raid.

"Come! the rest of the night belongs to us," he said to Fred when the lieutenant had delivered his report.

"What is to be done?"

"We must find out what has become of our friend Fred. You left him on guard where you left me; when you got back he was gone. I am now convinced from what happened to me that Fred had an encounter with Red Rolfe."

"And got worsted?"

"It looks that way."

Fred Webb was silent. He clinched his hands when he thought of his companion in the clutches of the ex-smuggler.

"If Red Rolfe corralled him, he may have taken him into the old watch-fixer's house," he said.

"Do you think so?" asked Archy Ray, with a light laugh.

"I do."

"So do I, Fred," was the reply. "If Fred fell into the hands of the gang he crossed the threshold of that house, which is just what I am going to do between now and daylight."

The young detective spoke with a resoluteness which showed that nothing could turn him from his purpose.

"There is to be no hoodwinking of this little party," he continued. "The plausible words of a supposed watch-tinker will not draw the wool over my eyes."

"Then you think, Archy, that the old man we encountered was playing a part?"

"I would bet my head on it. Among the many little incidents of Red Rolfe's life that I have picked up here and there is his career as watchmaker."

Fred Webb uttered an ejaculation of surprise.

"What! do you think that Adam Andrews was Red Rolfe?" he exclaimed.

"There is no doubt of it, but we will get to the bottom of this thing before long."

The two boys made their way to the vicinity of the house which had been entered but not a ray of light told them that it might be inhabited. It was silent and lonely, and the gas lamp near by had been turned down until the place was dark.

"Don't you see! look at that lamp!" whispered Archy. "Something has happened here since we left."

The boys beat a noiseless retreat and entered the small yard behind the house.

For a while they saw nothing to reward them, but at last the faintest gleam of light was visible where a window was.

"The old shanty is not deserted. My opinion is that if we were to enter it, we would not find Adam Andrews mending watches."

Archy Ray was right.

At that moment a man entered one of the rooms and met a young girl who sprung from a low cot at his appearance.

"We don't want any foolishness, Mabel," said the man, who had locked the door behind him as he took a chair and motioned the girl back to

the cot. "A husband has been selected for you, and the minister will be here in a few moments."

"But I don't want to marry. I have told you—"

"We can't afford to consult your wishes in this matter," was the quick interruption heartlessly spoken.

"If there is any money at the bottom of this game take it and let me go back to Green Hill. If I had never met the man called Silas Strong I would not be here. The ring is at your service. I wish I had lost it long ago."

"We don't, girl," laughed the man, who did not look like the old watch-tinker who had met Fred and the police. "Without it we could play no game worth playing. No, my dear, if you had lost the ring we would not be getting you a husband to-night."

Mabel Marshall looked at the man who talked thus with the coolness of the practiced villain. She saw no mercy in his eyes, but she resolved to make one more effort for liberty.

"This marriage you talk of will do you no good," she said. "I shall expose it, and balk your game at the first opportunity."

"You will?" laughed the man, leaning forward and touching the girl's arm. "Very well! If you get that chance we will not object; but let me tell you that such work will cost you something more valuable than the diamond ring."

Mabel could not repress a shudder.

"What is that?—my life?"

"Play your game and see!" was the reply.

"You will not appear in society as the wife of Trix; oh, no! Your ring and certain statements will be shown in court, and we will get the prize we are playing for. After that we will not bother ourselves about the girl from Jersey."

"What have you discovered about me?" exclaimed Mabel. "I have asked you this question twenty times since I came to New York, but you will not speak. I can be no heiress, for Green Hill is associated with my earliest recollections. Who was my mother?—and my father?"

"We know all," said the man. "We've got the whole thing beyond dispute. Why, my little seraph, you're going to be the making of us. Hark! the knot-tie has come."

At that moment the sound of a vehicle stopping before the house was heard in the room, and the man went toward the door.

Mabel got up and stood in the middle of the room and listened. Her cheeks had no color, and she plainly showed the effects of her adventures since leaving home.

"Are these men to be permitted to play their infamous game out?" she exclaimed. "Merciful Heaven! am I to become the wife of a criminal of some kind? Is there no help?"

While she spoke the front door opened, and she heard footsteps and voices in the hall.

Both came toward the door.

All at once Mabel sprang forward and pushed the portal shut.

"I will stave off this wickedness as long as I can!" she cried, and the next moment her hand shoved a strong round bolt into its place.

"Now, let them carry out their plans!" she said stepping back, her bright eyes flashing, and her hands tightly clinched. "I am mistress of the situation at last!"

Mabel heard the footsteps stop at the door, and for a moment the voices were still.

At last a low rap was heard.

The girl did not stir, but listened with a triumphant smile at her lips.

"Mabel, we don't want any by-plays," said a voice which she recognized. "Open the door and let us in."

There was no answer, only the flash in the eyes of the Jersey girl seemed to grow brighter.

"Did you hear, girl?"

Mabel went to the door and laid her hand on the bolt, but only to feel that it was still in its place.

"I heard you," she said speaking in tones heard by three men who stood in the hallway.

"Then, open the door!"

"Not to you!"

The girl heard a grated oath, and a voice said:

"Break it down!"

Instinctively the Vampires' beautiful young victim drew back and looked about for a weapon. She seemed to have gained a man's strength in an instant, and the next moment she had seized a chair.

"What are you going to do, girl?" demanded a voice beyond the door.

"This is a poor way to secure good treatment in the future. A woman on her bridal night should not act thus!"

A low laugh followed the last sentence. Mabel stepped toward the door and stationed herself at one side.

"I am no match for these men," she said, "but I am going to fight for my honor! They have discovered something connected with my history which they are trying to turn to account. What! become the wife of the man called Trix by his companions? No! Trix is a criminal, and I will never become the wife of a man like him!"

Meanwhile the men in the hallway had stepped back from the door, and were conversing in tones that did not reach the girl's ears.

"Hadn't we better put the ceremony off till to-morrow night?" asked one of the three who had a semi-clerical look. "We can't get to the girl without a noise, and I don't want to figure in anything scandalous."

"The marriage takes place to-night—now!" was the answer.

"Do you want postponement, Trix?"

"No! now or never!"

"That is precisely what I say," was the answer, and the speaker threw a fierce look toward the door. "Noise or not, the ceremony shall proceed. What's the door to us?"

He drew his figure to its full height and with blazing eyes stepped forward and put his lips near the key-hole.

"For the last time, Mabel, open the door!" he said.

"I shall not touch it!"

The man stepped back again and seemed ready to throw himself forward. He looked heavy enough to send the door crashing from its hinges, and he said with a laugh to his companions as he braced himself:

"Now watch the splinters fly!"

The next moment he dashed against the door with all his force and made it crack.

"How's that?" he laughed to his companions. "I've made a battering-ram of myself before this, ha, ha! Who wouldn't break a door down for a girl like the one beyond this one?"

The door had been split from top to bottom by the ferocious onslaught and one of the panels had fallen out.

The youngest member of the party, our friend Trix, went forward, but the door-breaker caught his sleeve.

"Mebbe the beauty has armed herself with a chair," he said. Don't put your head through the panel, Trix. Let me finish the work on the door."

The speaker stepped in front of the young man and raised his hands to complete the work on the door.

The next moment, however, a voice at the lower end of the hallway startled the three and they turned in that direction.

"The man that lifts a hand I will kill in his tracks!" said the voice in startling sternness. "Your death-dial did its part, Red Rolfe, but the trap failed."

The man who was about to assault the door again leaned forward and then uttered an exclamation of real surprise.

"The ferret we sprung the trap on several hours ago!" he cried. "Look, Trix! He says the machinery failed to do its duty."

"I will not fail to do mine if you resist!" was the reply. "Get away from that door!"

The three men drew back and in the light of the gas-jet overhead, glared at the leveled revolver of Fred Martin!

CHAPTER XVI.

AT LAST.

THE young detective whom we saw last in the little room waiting for the death-dial to do its work, looked over the cocked six-shooter with a coolness that almost unnerved the trio before the broken door.

Red Rolfe, whose charge had bursted the panels, glared at Fred Martin like a maddened lion disturbed over the carcass of his victim, and Trix put his hand near his weapon, but did not draw.

"The next time your infamous trap is sprung you must look after the victim," continued Fred. "I am here because the machinery failed to do its whole duty. The girl, your prey, is in that room. If you advance toward it, I will open on all three!"

The boy came down the hall as he spoke, and into the stronger light, where it was seen that he had passed through peril of some kind.

He did not stop until he stood before the door that led to the girl. The three men had been forced into a corner behind the door leading into the street. He knew that even though he held the winning hand, he was still in great danger. Red Rolfe and Trix eyed him like hawks. One

tremor in the hand that held the revolver, a second's drooping of the eye that looked over it, and the two Vampires would spring forward.

Fred Martin knew that the girl was near. He heard her quick breaths beyond the broken door, and if he had glanced through the panel he would have seen her still clutching the chair with which she had intended to defend herself to the last.

Suddenly there came a sound from the sidewalk that startled both Fred and the three men.

"If you attempt to move off with that cab, you will tumble from your seat a fit subject for the coroner!" were the words that came to the ears of those in the hall.

"I'm not going away," was the answer. "Everybody knows that I'm Bob Benton, an honest cabman, and I'm not accountable for the habits of the people whom I serve."

"Honest? God save the mark," was the laughing response. "The Statue at the ferry doesn't give you the best recommendation in the world. So, don't talk your honesty up, Bob, but keep your seat till we say go."

"It is Archy!" was Fred Martin's mental ejaculation. "We have the Bowery Vampires at last if he will come to the rescue."

We left Archy Ray and Fred Webb in the rear of the house just before the onslaught by Red Rolfe on the door. They were unable to see anything by a close inspection of the closed windows, but they heard the crash that followed the ex-smuggler's charge.

This sound drew the attention of the young detectives to the front of the house, and there they discovered the well-known figure of Bob Benton perched on the box of his cab and awaiting orders.

The rascally young Jehu was thoroughly frightened when Archy Ray presented himself at the front wheel and thrust a revolver into his face. Bob almost tumbled from the seat, and would have given his horses the whip if he had not been checked by the words the people in the hall heard from Archy's lips.

"That settles it," said the head of the detective firm to his companion. "This house is not the home of Adam Andrews, watch-tinker, but one of the haunts of Red Rolfe, and we have caught the bird at home."

Fred Martin could not see what was going on outside, but he knew that Archy, and perhaps Fred Webb, was near at hand, and that was enough.

All at once the knob turned.

Red Rolfe started and grated his teeth, as he wheeled toward the door.

"If you dare!" came over Fred's leveled pistol, as he anticipated the desperado's action. "Touch that door, Red Rolfe, and you fall where you stand!"

Then he raised his voice. "I am in here, and the rascals are cornered. Open the door!"

A moment later and the command was obeyed, and the opening of the door showed the Bowery outlaws, two well-built youths, on the step, with their keen eyes already upon them.

"March out!" said Archy Ray. "But in the first place, throw down your weapons one at a time. Come! be quick about it!"

Trix was the first to obey. He disarmed himself, and bit his lip as he let a revolver slide to the floor.

Red Rolfe glared at the boys, but did not make a move.

"What! shall I disarm you?" exclaimed Archy Ray, and he seemed to lean toward the ex-smuggler as he spoke. "You know, Reddy, that this is a game for more than wealth. When the watchmaker of Berne encountered a man who refused to disarm at his command, he did not wait."

Red Rolfe started visibly, which brought a laugh to the young detective's lips.

"You see I know something of your European life," he said. "I have made it a study, and I guess I have you pat, Red Rolfe. Come, down with the droppers!"

Sullenly and with a growl the ex-smuggler obeyed, and two more revolvers lay where Trix's had fallen.

"Now come out!" continued Archy.

The three men appeared on the step. Bob Benton looked at them with eyes filled with surprise.

The lamp near by had been turned on in full blaze again, and the boy detectives who watched the prisoners could see the slightest movement.

"Into the cab," said Archy to the trio. "Mr. Benton will continue in your employ for a while yet, Reddy."

The ex-smuggler and his friends were soon seated in the vehicle, and the former whispered:

"We'll have the upper hand in five minutes!"

To their dismay, however, Archy Ray and Fred Webb placed themselves on each side of the cab, and Archy said to the driver:

"Move along at a walk, Bob. If the horses trot I will not be answerable for your safety. To 300 Mulberry. Now, forward!"

The countenances of the three worthies suddenly fell.

"Tartarus take the young imps!" grated Red Rolfe. "It looks as if our game was up."

He was not wrong in his surmises, as the results of the ride proved.

A few minutes later the cab, which the two boys had guarded with hawk's eyes, drew up in front of one of the most noted houses in New York, the Mulberry quarters of the city police.

Archy Ray opened the door and asked the occupants of the vehicle to step out, which they did, much to the astonishment of the police who awaited them.

"Now, back to the house we left, and drive lively," said Archy to Bob Benton, who gave the team the best of his whip, and dashed away at a good rate.

As the vehicle drew up in front of the house, the young spotter sprung out and rushed up the steps.

"We have you at last!" he exclaimed, with a smile, as he caught sight of a young girl who was Fred Martin's companion in a room that had a broken door.

"And I thank you for coming," was the reply. "I am Mabel Marshall, of Green Hill, but from the actions of the Bowery Vampires, I must be more than a simple country girl."

"I think we can give the reporters a sensation," said Archy.

"Then you know—"

"I have an idea," laughed the young detective. "Let me escort you with Fred to a better place than this, and while we are moving he can tell me about his adventures."

The house was not deserted until it had been searched from cellar to garret.

"Here is the dial," said Fred, leading Archy into a little room. "The infamous machine is silent now. When those hands reached the 'twelve,' the whole floor sunk suddenly, and careening in pitch darkness, precipitated me into a pit, where I was left for dead. It was the most terrible fall a boy ever had—worse than your tumble when Madam Bluebird's stair trap was sprung. I managed to crawl out of that hole by the stones with which it is walled. I found myself under the floor of the trap, and by good luck reached a door in the darkness. If Red Rolfe had had the remotest idea that his prisoner was alive, I would never have reached that door. It let me into another dark room, where I found a table on which lay several revolvers and a lot of burglar tools. I took one of the former, you may be sure. Voices directed me to the hall, and Mabel here knows that I got there in the nick of time. The ticking of that infernal clock stopped the moment the trap was sprung. The hands are where I saw them last. Red Rolfe said that 'something' would happen, and something did."

The work of the boy detectives did not get into the morning papers, and the city did not know for some hours that the overthrow of the Bowery Vampires had followed so soon upon the announcement of Pet Levi's murder.

The triumph was most complete.

Red Rolfe and Trix were brought face to face with Julius and Phlox, and the four men fell to abusing one another in fine style.

In the midst of it all Phlox said madly:

"There's no blood on my hands and I will give the court the whole story."

"You will?" cried the ex-smuggler.

"Yes."

The next moment the Vampire flew at his pal and would have choked him to death if he had not been taken away.

"We have another witness," said Archy Ray. "I will corral Madam Bluebird."

A visit to the den near the Bowery brought to light another sensation. We know that Madam Bluebird told Fred Webb that the police would never get her, and she kept her word.

When Archy Ray visited the house to get her, he found the lights low and the Amazon on her face on the floor.

Dead?

Dead! and by the hand that had committed countless crimes—her own!

As for the young Jew, Simon Lang, who picked Mabel's pocket at the ferry, he was never heard of, and Trix who met him when he followed Julius, his robber, to Pet Levi's never told what became of him.

The Bowery Vampires got their trials and aid-

ed by Phlox, who turned state's evidence coward-like to shorten his term, the whole infamous scheme against Mabel came to light, and established her claim to the property of the Bond street merchant. The ring which was proven to have belonged to the merchant's missing wife fixed her identity beyond doubt, and the testimony of Phlox, who had worked the case up, was not needed to substantiate it.

The murder of Pet Levi was fixed upon Julius, and it came out during the trial that the old pawnbroker was killed because he had overheard the conspirators at work. It was a base crime, and one for which the perpetrator paid the direst penalty.

Red Rolfe, Trix and Phlox went to Sing Sing for good terms, and to-day the Bowery Vampires exist only in the stories of those who played an important part in their suppression.

Bob Benton fled the city before he could be held as a witness, thus confirming The Statue's estimate of him. He will turn up somewhere before he dies in the hands of the law, for there is not one drop of good blood in the young scapegrace.

Of course with Red Rolfe's arrest Adam Andrews the old watch-tinker disappeared from sight. He took that character to deceive the police, and Trix masqueraded no more as John Clane the man who got into the wrong house. The play was successful, but not for long.

The firm of Archy Ray and Company, Detectives, still does business in New York, but it now occupies elegant quarters some distance from the old ones, and business is flourishing.

It is rumored, however, and I think justly so, that the head of the house will soon lead to the altar a certain young lady of means, who has cause for recollecting the many crimes of the Bowery Vampires.

And the reader will suggest, I am sure, that the Twin Feds be the groom's best men.

Of the many cases conducted successfully by the three young spotters, there is none that does them more credit than Mabel's rescue from the villainous schemes of the Bowery Vampires.

THE END.

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